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PUBLISHER: *Lawrence E. Spivak* EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 21, No. 110, JAN. 1953. Published monthly by Mercury Publications, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U.S.A. and possessions, Canada and the Pan American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the post office at Concord, N. H. under the act of March 3, 1879.

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ON CHRISTMAS DAY IN THE MORNING

by MARGERY ALLINGHAM

SIR LEO PERSUIVANT, THE CHIEF Constable, had been sitting in his comfortable study after a magnificent lunch and talking shyly of the sadness of Christmas while his guest, Mr. Albert Campion, most favored of his large house party, had been laughing at him gently.

It was true, the younger man had admitted, his pale eyes sleepy behind his horn-rimmed spectacles, that, however good the organization, the festival was never quite the same after one was middle-aged, but then only dear old Leo would expect it to be, and meanwhile, what a truly remarkable bird that had been!

But at that point the Superintendent had arrived with his grim little story and everything had seemed quite spoiled.

At the moment their visitor sat in a highbacked chair, against a paneled wall festooned with holly and tinsel, his round black eyes hard and preoccupied under his short gray hair. Superintendent Bussy was one of those lean and urgent countrymen who never quite lose their fondness for a genuine wonder. Despite years of experience and disillusion, the thing that simply can't have happened and yet indubitably *has* happened, retains a place in their cosmos. He was holding forth about one now. It had already ruined his Christmas and had kept a great many other people out in the sleet all day; but nothing would induce him to leave it alone even for five minutes. The turkey sandwiches, which Sir Leo had insisted on ordering for him, were disappearing without him noticing them and the glass of scotch and soda stood untasted.

"You can see I had to come at once," he was saying for the third time. "I had to. I don't see what happened and that's a fact. It's a sort of miracle. Besides," he eyed them angrily, "fancy killing a poor old *postman* on Christmas morning! That's inhuman, isn't it? Unnatural."

Sir Leo nodded his white head. "Horrible," he agreed. "Now, let me get this clear. The man appears to have been run down at the Benham-Ashby crossroads . . ."

Bussy took a handful of cigarettes from the box at his side and arranged them in a cross on the table.

"Look," he said. "Here is the Ashby road with a slight bend in it, and here, running at right angles slap through the curve, is the Benham road. As you know as well as I do, Sir Leo, they're both good wide main thoroughfares, as roads go in these parts. This morning the Benham postman, old Fred Noakes, a bachelor thank God and a good chap, came along the Benham Road loaded down with Christmas mail."

"On a bicycle?" asked Campion.

"Naturally. On a bicycle. He called

at the last farm before the crossroads and left just about 10 o'clock. We know that because he had a cup of tea there. Then his way led him over the crossing and on towards Benham proper."

He paused and looked up from his cigarettes.

"There was very little traffic early today, terrible weather all the time, and quite a bit of activity later; so we've got no skid marks to help us. Well, to resume: no one seems to have seen old Noakes, poor chap, until close on half an hour later. Then the Benham constable, who lives some 300 yards from the crossing and on the Benham road, came out of his house and walked down to his gate to see if the mail had come. He saw the postman at once, lying in the middle of the road across his machine. He was dead then."

"You suggest he'd been trying to carry on, do you?" put in Sir Leo.

"Yes. He was walking, pushing the bike, and had dropped in his tracks. There was a depressed fracture in the side of his skull where something — say, a car mirror — had struck him. I've got the doctor's report. I'll show you that later. Meanwhile there's something else."

Bussy's finger turned to his other line of cigarettes.

"Also, just about 10, there were a couple of fellows walking here on the *Ashby* road, just before the bend. They report that they were almost run down by a wildly driven car which came up behind them. It missed them and careered off out of their sight round the bend towards the crossing. But a few minutes later, half a mile farther on, on the other side of the crossroads, a police car met and succeeded in stopping the same car. There was a row and the driver, getting the wind up suddenly, started up again, skidded and smashed the car into the nearest telephone pole. The car turned out to be stolen and there were four half-full bottles of gin in the back. The two occupants were both fighting drunk and are now detained."

Mr. Campion took off his spectacles and blinked at the speaker.

"You suggest that there was a connection, do you? — that the postman and the gin drinkers met at the crossroads? Any signs on the car?"

Bussy shrugged his shoulders. "Our chaps are at work on that now," he said. "The second smash has complicated things a bit, but last time I 'phoned they were hopeful."

"But my dear fellow!" Sir Leo was puzzled. "If you can get expert evidence of a collision between the car and the postman, your worries are over. That is, of course, if the medical evidence permits the theory that the unfortunate fellow picked himself up and struggled the 300 yards towards the constable's house."

Bussy hesitated.

"There's the trouble," he admitted. "If that were all we'd be sitting pretty, but it's not and I'll tell you why. In that 300 yards of Benham Road, between the crossing and the

spot where old Fred died, there is a stile which leads to a footpath. Down the footpath, the best part of a quarter of a mile over very rough going, there is one small cottage, and at that cottage letters were delivered this morning. The doctor says Noakes might have staggered the 300 yards up the road leaning on his bike, but he puts his foot down and says the other journey, over the stile and so on, would have been absolutely impossible. I've talked to the doctor. He's the best man in the world on the job and we won't shake him on that."

"All of which would argue," observed Mr. Campion brightly, "that the postman was hit by a car *after* he came back from the cottage — between the stile and the constable's house."

"That's what the constable thought." Bussy's black eyes were snapping. "As soon as he'd telephoned for help he slipped down to the cottage to see if Noakes had actually called there. When he found he had, he searched the road. He was mystified though because both he and his missus had been at their window for an hour watching for the mail and they hadn't seen a vehicle of any sort go by either way. If a car did hit the postman where he fell, it must have turned and gone back afterwards."

Leo frowned at him. "What about the other witnesses? Did they see any second car?"

"No." Bussy was getting to the heart of the matter and his face shone with honest wonder. "I made sure of that. Everybody sticks to it that there was no other car or cart about and a good job too, they say, considering the way the smashed-up car was being driven. As I see it, it's a proper mystery, a kind of not very nice miracle, and those two beauties are going to get away with murder on the strength of it. Whatever our fellows find on the car they'll never get past the doctor's testimony."

Mr. Campion got up sadly. The sleet was beating on the windows, and from inside the house came the more cheerful sound of tea cups. He nodded to Sir Leo.

"I fear we shall have to see that footpath before it gets too dark. In this weather, conditions may have changed by tomorrow."

Sir Leo sighed. " 'On Christmas day in the morning!' " he quoted bitterly. "Perhaps you're right."

They stopped their dreary journey at the Benham police station to pick up the constable. He proved to be a pleasant youngster with a face like one of the angel choir and boots like a fairy tale, but he had liked the postman and was anxious to serve as their guide.

They inspected the crossroads and the bend and the spot where the car had come to grief. By the time they reached the stile, the world was gray and freezing, and all trace of Christmas had vanished, leaving only the hopeless winter it had been invented to refute.

Mr. Campion negotiated the stile

and Sir Leo followed him with some difficulty. It was an awkward climb, and the path below was narrow and slippery. It wound out into the mist before them, apparently without end.

The procession slid and scrambled on in silence for what seemed a mile, only to encounter a second stile and a plank bridge over a stream, followed by a brief area of what appeared to be simple bog. As he struggled out of it, Bussy pushed back his dripping hat and gazed at the constable.

"You're not having a game with us, I suppose?" he inquired.

"No, sir." The boy was all blush. "The little house is just here. You can't make it out because it's a bit low. There it is, sir. There."

He pointed to a hump in the near distance which they had all taken to be a haystack. Gradually it emerged as the roof of a hovel which squatted with its back towards them in the wet waste.

"Good Heavens!" Sir Leo regarded its desolation with dismay. "Does anybody really live there?"

"Oh, yes, sir. An old widow lady. Mrs. Fyson's the name."

"Alone?" He was aghast. "How old?"

"I don't rightly know, sir. Quite old. Over 75, must be."

Sir Leo stopped in his tracks and a silence fell on the company. The scene was so forlorn, so unutterably quiet in its loneliness, that the world might have died.

It was Campion who broke the spell.

"Definitely no walk for a dying man," he said firmly. "Doctor's evidence completely convincing, don't you think? Now that we're here, perhaps we should drop in and see the householder."

Sir Leo shivered. "We can't *all* get in," he objected. "Perhaps the Superintendent . . ."

"No. You and I will go." Campion was obstinate. "Is that all right with you, Super?"

Bussy waved them on. "If you have to dig for us we shall be just about here," he said cheerfully. "I'm over my ankles now. What a place! Does anybody ever come here *except* the postman, Constable?"

Campion took Sir Leo's arm and led him firmly round to the front of the cottage. There was a yellow light in the single window on the ground floor and, as they slid up a narrow brick path to the very small door, Sir Leo hung back. His repugnance was as apparent as the cold.

"I hate this," he muttered. "Go on. Knock if you must."

Mr. Campion obeyed, stooping so that his head might miss the lintel. There was a movement inside, and at once the door was opened wide, so that he was startled by the rush of warmth from within.

A little old woman stood before him, peering up without astonishment. He was principally aware of bright eyes.

"Oh, dear," she said unexpectedly, and her voice was friendly. "You *are* damp. Come in." And then, looking

past him at the skulking Sir Leo. "Two of you! Well, isn't that nice. Mind your poor heads."

The visit became a social occasion before they were well in the room. Her complete lack of surprise, coupled with the extreme lowness of the ceiling, gave her an advantage from which the interview never entirely recovered.

From the first she did her best to put them at ease.

"You'll have to sit down at once," she said, laughing as she waved them to two little chairs one on either side of the small black stove. "Most people have to. I'm all right, you see, because I'm not tall. This is my chair here. You must undo that," she went on touching Sir Leo's coat. "Otherwise you may take cold when you go out. It is so very chilly, isn't it? But so seasonable and that's always nice."

Afterwards it was Mr. Campion's belief that neither he nor Sir Leo had a word to say for themselves for the first five minutes. They were certainly seated and looking round the one downstairs room which the house contained before anything approaching a conversation took place.

It was not a sordid room, yet the walls were unpapered, the furniture old without being in any way antique, and the place could hardly have been called neat. But at the moment it was festive. There was holly over the two pictures and on the mantle above the stove, and a crowd of bright Christmas cards.

Their hostess sat between them, near the table. It was set for a small tea party and the oil lamp with the red and white frosted glass shade, which stood in the centre of it, shed a comfortable light on her serene face.

She was a short, plump old person whose white hair was brushed tightly to her little round head. Her clothes were all knitted and of an assortment of colors, and with them she wore, most unsuitably, a maltese-silk lace collarette and a heavy gold chain. It was only when they noticed she was blushing that they realized she was shy.

"Oh," she exclaimed at last, making a move which put their dumbness to shame. "I quite forgot to say it before. A Merry Christmas to you! Isn't it wonderful how it keeps coming round? Very quickly, I'm afraid, but it is so nice when it does. It's such a *happy* time, isn't it?"

Sir Leo pulled himself together with an effort which was practically visible.

"I must apologize," he began. "This is an imposition on such a day. I . . ." But she smiled and silenced him again.

"Not at all," she said. "Oh, not at all. Visitors are a great treat. Not everybody braves my footpath in the winter."

"But some people do, of course?" ventured Mr. Campion.

"Of course." She shot him her shy smile. "Certainly every week. They send down from the village every week and only this morning a young man, the policeman to be exact, came

all the way over the fields to wish me the compliments of the season and to know if I'd got my post!"

"And you had!" Sir Leo glanced at the array of Christmas cards with relief. He was a kindly, sentimental, family man, with a horror of loneliness.

She nodded at the brave collection with deep affection.

"It's lovely to see them all up there again, it's one of the real joys of Christmas, isn't it? Messages from people you love and who love you and all so *pretty*, too."

"Did you come down bright and early to meet the postman?" Sir Leo's question was disarmingly innocent, but she looked ashamed and dropped her eyes.

"I wasn't up! Wasn't it dreadful? I was late this morning. In fact, I was only just picking the letters off the mat there when the policeman called. He helped me gather them, the nice boy. There were such a lot. I lay lazily in bed this morning thinking of them instead of moving."

"Still, you heard them come." Sir Leo was very satisfied. "And you knew they were there."

"Oh, yes." She sounded content. "I knew they were there. May I offer you a cup of tea? I'm waiting for my party . . . just a woman and her dear little boy; they won't be long. In fact, when I heard your knock I thought they were here already."

Sir Leo excused them, but not with any undue haste. He appeared to be enjoying himself. Meanwhile, Mr. Campion, who had risen to inspect the display on the mantle shelf more closely, helped her to move the kettle so that it should not boil too soon.

The Christmas cards were splendid. There were nearly 30 of them in all, and the envelopes which had contained them were packed in a neat bundle and tucked behind the clock, to add even more color to the whole.

In design, they were mostly conventional. There were wreaths and firesides, saints and angels, with a secondary line of gardens in unseasonable bloom and Scotch terriers in tam-o'shanter caps. One magnificent card was entirely in ivorine, with a cutout disclosing a coach and horses surrounded by roses and forget-me-nots. The written messages were all warm and personal, all breathing affection and friendliness and the outspoken joy of the season:

The very best to you, Darling, from all at The Limes.

To dear Auntie from Little Phil.

Love and Memories. Edith and Ted.

There is no wish like the old wish. Warm regards, George.

For dearest Mother.

Cheerio. Lots of love. Just off. Writing. Take care of yourself. Sonny.

For dear little Agnes with love from us all.

Mr. Campion stood before them for a long time but at length he turned away. He had to stoop to avoid the beam and yet he towered over the old woman who stood looking up at him.

Something had happened. It had

suddenly become very still in the house. The gentle hissing of the kettle sounded unnaturally loud. The recollection of its lonely remoteness returned to chill the cosy room.

The old lady had lost her smile and there was wariness in her eyes.

"Tell me." Campion spoke very gently. "What do you do? Do you put them all down there on the mat in their envelopes before you go to bed on Christmas Eve?"

While the point of his question and the enormity of it was dawning up on Sir Leo, there was silence. It was breathless and unbearable until old Mrs. Fyson pierced it with a laugh of genuine naughtiness.

"Well," she said, "it does make it more fun!" She glanced back at Sir Leo whose handsome face was growing steadily more and more scarlet.

"Then . . . ?" He was having difficulty with his voice. "Then the postman did *not* call this morning, ma'am?"

She stood looking at him placidly, the flicker of the smile still playing round her mouth.

"The postman never calls here except when he brings something from the Government," she said pleasantly. "Everybody gets letters from the Government nowadays, don't they? But he doesn't call here with *personal* letters because, you see, I'm the last of us." She paused and frowned very faintly. It rippled like a shadow over the smoothness of her quiet, careless brow. "There's been so many wars," she said sadly.

"But, dear lady . . ." Sir Leo was completely overcome. There were tears in his eyes and his voice failed him.

She patted his arm to comfort him.

"My dear man," she said kindly. "Don't be distressed. It's not sad. It's Christmas. We all loved Christmas. They sent me their love at Christmas and you see *I've still got it.* At Christmas I remember them and they remember me . . . wherever they are." Her eyes strayed to the ivorine card with the coach on it. "I do sometimes wonder about poor George," she remarked seriously. "He was my husband's elder brother and he really did have quite a shocking life. But he once sent me that remarkable card and I kept it with the others. After all, we ought to be charitable, oughtn't we? At Christmas time . . ."

As the four men plodded back through the fields, Bussy was jubilant.

"That's done the trick," he said. "Cleared up the mystery and made it all plain sailing. We'll get those two crooks for doing in poor old Noakes. A real bit of luck that Mr. Campion was here," he added generously, as he squelched on through the mud. "The old girl was just cheering herself up and you fell for it, eh, Constable? Oh, don't worry, my boy. There's no harm done, and it's a thing that might have deceived anybody. Just let it be a lesson to you. I know how it happened. You didn't want to worry the old thing with the tale of a death

on Christmas morning, so you took the sight of the Christmas cards as evidence and didn't go into it. As it turned out, you were wrong. That's life."

He thrust the young man on ahead of him and came over to Mr. Campion.

"What beats me is how you cottoned to it," he confided. "What gave you the idea?"

"I merely read it, I'm afraid." Mr. Campion sounded apologetic. "All the envelopes were there, sticking out from behind the clock. The top one had a ha'penny stamp on it, so I looked at the postmark. It was 1914."

Bussy laughed "Given to you," he chuckled. "Still, I bet you had a job to believe your eyes."

"Ah." Mr. Campion's voice was thoughtful in the dusk. "That, Super, that was the really difficult bit."

Sir Leo, who had been striding in silence, was the last to climb up onto the road. He glanced anxiously towards the village for a moment or so, and presently touched Campion on the shoulder.

"Look there."

A woman was hurrying towards them and at her side, earnest and expectant, trotted a small, plump child. They scurried past and as they paused by the stile, and the woman lifted the boy onto the footpath, Sir Leo expelled a long sighing breath.

"So there was a party," he said simply. "Thank God for that. Do you know, Campion, all the way back here I've been wonderin'."

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CRIME PASSIONNEL

by LOUIS BROMFIELD

SHE CAME TO US RECOMMENDED BY Sister Theresa of St. Joseph's, in the cheerful summer of 1932, to do the nursery laundry and scrub the nursery floors. She was quite a big girl and very strong and well developed for the sixteen years Sister Theresa said she had spent on this earth. Her parents lived in a small house near the millrace on the road to Fleurines, where once the hounds were blessed every year on St. Hubert's Day — a small, romantic house overshadowed by poplar trees, with a rose tree called Les Sept Sœurs climbing over the house, just such a house as Abbé Prévost would have chosen for Manon Lescaut.

Joséphine was her name — not a flashy name like Colette or Jacqueline or even Euphémie, but just a commonplace, middle-class name which might mean anything at all. She had a high-colored and lusty beauty, like a rather bad, overpainted Flemish picture, and a curious habit of looking at you, especially if you were a man, and giggling. Afterward, it occurred to me that this might have given us the tip-off, but at the moment we passed it over, since it was difficult to find anybody to wash the diapers and nighties for a nursery overcrowded by three children of our own and five small visiting cousins, inconsiderately spaced a year apart, from four and a half years to six months.

Although Senlis was a dead, ecclesiastical city and not an industrial town, there was a crisis in domestic labor caused by the presence of a single factory known as Le Caoutchouc de Senlis and given over to the manufacture of rubber goods. It occupied a handsome old house just across the street from ours, by the edge of the canal which flowed through our garden. After the canal had passed the factory, it became the moat which surrounded the ramparts of the ancient Vauban fortifications of the town. Le Caoutchouc de Senlis was important in our lives because it had absorbed all the young girls who might have been available as nursery maids — all except Joséphine. We discovered that Joséphine had resisted the lure of the Caoutchouc de Senlis because she and her mother felt the moral effect of such

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an establishment was not good — that factory work was beneath a young woman of her accomplishments. We did not understand at the time the full extent of the rôle which ambition was to play in Joséphine's career.

She began her duties with gusto and for a time was considered a great success even by Nanny, one of those paragons, produced only by England, who are an odd mixture of extravagance and rigid respectability. She was a liberal at heart and, in some respects, even a radical, but she was deeply committed, nevertheless, to a regard for form and what is proper. For a few days, Joséphine, large, handsome, and young, seemed to be just the ticket for the nursery.

Nanny made no trouble at first, but the two Marias were tougher. They were cousins of a certain age, one called Marie and the other Maria to keep them straight, gifted with demoniac energy and a devotion to stirring up clouds of dust (which only settled back again after they had gone away), breaking dishes, and listening at keyholes, although what they gained by this I do not know, since all family conversation was conducted in English, of which they professed not to understand a word. Above everything else, they were virgins, and, believe me, in France a virgin can be a virgin as in no other country on earth. A real French virgin can find more voluptuous pleasure in her profession than Nana or Zaza ever found in hers. The two Marias were like that. They were tough virgins. From the very beginning they claimed that they smelled a rat about Joséphine, although I imagine that their suspicions at first were based solely on Joséphine's healthy good looks, which after all are something of a traditional cause for suspicion in France.

The cook, Marguerite, was no trouble at all for Joséphine. Marguerite came from Périgord, was large, handsome, maternal, gay, and a wonderful cook. She was a widow with two grown sons and her attitude toward Joséphine was an understanding one. She believed that girls should enjoy themselves. She even kept the secret about the downstairs toilet window.

This window, like the others on the street side of the house, was protected by a heavy iron grille, which swung on hinges and was padlocked in place. The grilles were meant to keep out intruders, although later they failed notably with both Senegalese and Germans. They were not designed to keep people *inside* the house, or at least no one had thought of them in that connection except Joséphine. She might, of course, have escaped to her nocturnal rendezvous by the front door or by any of the windows on the garden side, but there was something in Joséphine, some hidden instinct for drama, which made her prefer to climb out the barred window in the ground-floor toilet.

How soon these nocturnal excursions began after her arrival to wash diapers is obscure, but I suspect,

from what we learned afterward, that she escaped to the ramparts, which were the local Grove of Apollo, the first night she spent in the house. At any rate, Marguerite, descending to the kitchen in quest of artichoke tea on one of the nights when she was suffering stomach distress, beheld through an open door the remarkable spectacle of Joséphine coming in through the window of the downstairs toilet at three in the morning. What pact was made between them, or whether Marguerite used the secret to exact some form of blackmail, I do not know, but in any case she did not reveal her secret until Joséphine later on betrayed herself by another singular outburst of her instinct for drama.

This happened on one of those rare evenings in northern France when it was too hot to sleep properly. The air was still and sultry, as if the whole world of Senlis were awaiting the Resurrection. Sticky dampness crept in at the open windows. It was decidedly a dramatic and unhealthy night. Even the children, in the crowded nursery bedrooms, stirred, wakened, and called out for "a drinka water." By two, however, the house was quiet and the last child had mercifully had enough water and fallen asleep. Then suddenly the still air was rent by piercing screams interrupted by sentences at first incoherent with violence.

In no time at all the windows on the second and third floors were crowded with eager faces looking down upon a curious scene, dimly revealed in the glow of a distant gas light. On the bridge just below were the dim figures of a man and a woman. The man, in the uniform of a corporal of the local spahi regiment, stood leaning back on his elbows, watching a woman who stood on the railing on the opposite side of the bridge. Considering the performance of the woman, the attitude of the soldier was one of utter cynicism, for the woman, who kept jumping up and down, was shouting, "*Je vais me jeter à l'eau! Je vais me jeter à l'eau!*"

There was only one element which spoiled the drama of the scene and turned it to pure farce. It may have accounted for the cynical attitude of the soldier. The bridge rail was not more than eight feet from the surface of the water and the water itself was not more than two feet deep.

It is hard to say how long this scene would have gone on entertaining its growing audience if the action of our neighbor, Monsieur Regnier, manager of the rubber factory, had not put an end to it. He was a large Frenchman of a disposition usually benign and phlegmatic, but the noise had wakened him out of the connubial slumber of a large double bed and he was mad. Leaning out of a second-floor window of the rubber factory, he bellowed "Hey, you!" in the voice of the Bull of Bashan. One good bellow was enough, for the woman stopped yelling and turned toward the window. Her arms dropped to her sides and she stood on the bridge

rail, transfixed by the spectacle of Monsieur Regnier in his nightshirt.

When he had got her attention, the manager of the rubber factory shouted, "All right! If you're going to jump, jump! If you're going to kill yourself, go ahead, do it, but don't keep honest citizens awake with your bellowing!" And with that he slammed down the window to shut out the unhealthy night air.

Now, the speech of Monsieur Regnier was as French as possible. It was clear, deliberate, and logical. It respected the sacred rights of the individual. The woman certainly had a right to do away with herself if she chose; that was none of his concern. But she had no right to keep the neighbors up while she was doing it. Having stated his position, Monsieur Regnier slammed down the window and went back to bed.

The speech made an impression; doubtless it appealed to the Gallic sense of justice and logic in the woman herself. Without another sound, she got down off the bridge rail and started off slowly up the street in the direction of the gas light. The soldier took his elbows off the bridge rail, lighted a cigarette, and followed at a little distance. As the woman came into the yellow flame of the gas light, we all recognized her as our Joséphine, who was supposed to be in virgin slumber in her room on the third floor.

Naturally, I was not the only one who recognized her. Two embattled virgins, the two Marias, hanging from their window on the third floor, were also familiar with the voluptuous figure and slow, hip-swinging saunter. They were downstairs in the dark waiting for her when she came in, a little before dawn, through the toilet window. The two Marias were fury incarnate. Their denunciations and her angry replies wakened the whole house.

But we kept Joséphine in our employ because the rubber factory was doing a booming business in its assault upon the French birth rate and there weren't any girls available to take her place. Driven by Nanny and the two Marias, I examined the grille covering the toilet window. Joséphine had acted with admirable directness. She had simply smashed the padlock and thrown it away. The padlock was replaced on my orders by the two Marias, who spent quite a long time over the operation, chattering together like a couple of old magpies, but my principal reaction to the episode was one of admiration for the vitality and health of Joséphine, who could wash diapers all day long and roam the Grove of Apollo all night with non-commissioned officers.

After this episode there was a persistent and marked coldness between Joséphine and the two Marias. The attitude of Marguerite was friendly and unchanged; doubtless the episode brought up happy memories of her own youth. Nanny took a purely British and hygienic stand; the moral aspect did not concern her, but she disapproved of having the girl who

washed diapers running about all night with spahi non-commissioned officers.

The summer passed and, what with padlocks and the consecrated spying of the two Marias, Joséphine appeared to be leading a more respectable life. But there we were deceived, for about three months after the scene at the bridge, Joséphine, as the result of carrying a heavy basket of freshly washed diapers through the back hall, had an accident, an accident which was indisputable evidence that Joséphine had certainly got out somehow and sometime.

This time the two Marias, outraged, took matters in their own hands and sent for Alcide to remove Joséphine and all her worldly goods, which were not much, to her mother's cottage.

Alcide was himself a character. He was 75 years old and led a placid life, disturbed only by the necessity of harnessing his old white horse twice a day to drive to the station and meet the branch-line train that ran between Chantilly and Crépy-en-Valois. The old horse drew a small and battered omnibus, which bore a brass plate on which was inscribed *Carrosserie Benguet 1878*. Aside from its service to and from the station, the omnibus was hired on special occasions for wedding parties or by old ladies making their annual round of calls. Now the two Marias had summoned it to transport the enemy Joséphine to her home.

Driving back from Paris, I chanced to pass the omnibus with Alcide on the box. Inside I discovered the figure of Joséphine between two black-clad and indignant Marias. Although she was feeling none too well, her head was raised proudly and defiantly in consciousness of her great advantage over the two virgins. She looked for all the world like Marie Antoinette on her way to the guillotine.

It was Marguerite who explained to me the disaster of the back hall. It was clear that she took the whole thing calmly and with detachment. When she had finished, she asked, "*Mais que voulez-vous? Cette Joséphine! C'est une manifestation de la nature! On ne peut pas changer une manifestation de la nature.*" Then she added, "*Les deux pauvres Maria!* They are eaten up with pride and envy." It was a curious choice of words — "pride and envy." The two Marias were proud of something they had kept which nobody ever wanted very much. They had made a kind of treasure out of it. And yet — somehow the envy came in, too.

That was the end of Joséphine so far as our household was directly concerned. By now we were inclined to take Marguerite's point of view regarding Joséphine as a "manifestation of nature," and that particular kind of manifestation simply didn't fit into our scheme of things.

Winter passed and spring came, and Joséphine, after a brief period of retirement, appeared again in the village streets, and as summer came on, it became clear that even her mother

had not been able to keep her shut up. Glimpses of her at the market, at the Firemen's Annual Exhibition, on parade on the ramparts made it only too evident that this *manifestation de la nature* had been frequenting the Grove of Apollo once more. It was also well known that Joséphine had no husband, although she was seen from time to time passing the time of day with a variety of gentlemen ranging from the coal man, who was rarely seen save in blackface, to the spahi cavalry sergeant. The sergeant was notable as an advance socially, since the highest rank hitherto attained by Joséphine was the corporal who watched her suicide attempt on the bridge with such cynical nonchalance. During all this period, the *manifestation de la nature* was as shameless as a volcano. Practically daily reports were brought back by one or both of the indignant Marias.

"*Cette femme!*" they would say. "*Cette créature! Quel exemple pour les jeunes filles bien élevées, pour les pauvres enfants innocents! Quel monstre!*" Their sustained and violent indignation caused a new high in damage to crockery and glassware. Tumblers, plates, cups, and saucers all became transmuted into Joséphines, and suffered accordingly.

Six weeks later, on a Sunday evening in June, Monsieur and Madame Verdeau were entertaining at a soirée. They were both musical — Monsieur Verdeau recited Verlaine and Baudelaire to the piano accompaniment of Madame Verdeau, and Madame Verdeau to her own accompaniment sang ballads in a fluty, uncertain voice. They were childless and lived on an income which steadily neared the point of invisibility. Their *soirées de musique* were held principally to give them an opportunity to recite and sing and to afford their friend, the Baron de Maricourt, a small man of about 65 and of no known sex, a chance to read aloud his latest poems or manuscripts.

The house of the Verdeaus stood near the part of the ramparts which had been leveled and made into a park — the part bordered by the cemetery and the commercially well-placed shop of the tombstone maker. The soirée at the Verdeaus was well under way and Madame Verdeau was singing *L'Esclave* in her fluty voice, a little off key, when she was interrupted by the appearance at the open French window of Joséphine's highly *enceinte* figure in a great state of agitation.

"*Venez! Venez vite!*" she was shouting. "*Un type vient de se suicider!*"

This alarming sight put a sudden end to Madame Verdeau's uncertain rendition of *L'Esclave*. Monsieur Verdeau, as master of the house, and the Baron de Maricourt, as the local Saint Simon, followed the stricken Joséphine to the scene of the hypothetical suicide. When they arrived, Monsieur Verdeau turned his electric torch upon the figure lying on the ground. There, in the circle of yellow light, lay the sergeant, dead as a doornail, with a revolver by his side.

Joséphine was giving one of her best performances. "I begged him to marry me!" she cried out. "I implored him! I swore on the head of my mother that he was the father of my child. He denied it. He said the coal man was the father and that rather than marry me he would commit suicide. And he did it!"

Here the Baron, after a glance at Joséphine's figure, interjected a pertinent but waspish remark, "And none too soon! But he'll do you very little good now as a husband or anything else."

The police were called and Joséphine was put away for the rest of the night in the cooler. During this procedure she continued to give a first-rate imitation of the performance of a tenth-rate actress. She wrung her hands, she wept, she called upon *le bon Dieu* as witness, and finally she walked proudly with upright head into her cell, pushing well in advance the evidence of her extremity.

The milkman brought the news to the two Marias on the following morning. He also brought the alarming information that Joséphine herself had purchased the revolver found on the scene of the "suicide." The two Marias were enchanted. They were triumphant. They were redeemed. Virtue had been vindicated as in the religious novels which were their only reading. "*Vous voyez!*" they kept repeating in turn. "*Vous voyez. J'ai toujours dit que cette fille était au fond meurtrière!*" Marguerite, the cook, the cynic, the complacent, suffered deeply from their triumph.

The career of Joséphine was not finished. She was brought to trial in the assize of Beauvais for the murder of one Henri Wentz, sergeant of the eighth regiment of Moroccan spahis. The case was of course reported in the Paris newspapers as a *crime passionnel*. Joséphine's picture, taken in first communion dress (the only one available), appeared in the *Matin*, the *Petit Parisien*, and even in *La Petite Gironde*, in Bordeaux. Reporters came out from Paris to interview her and her mother, who, it developed, was not quite bright and had had a career of her own, which, however, never attained the dramatic heights of that of her daughter.

Under the Code Napoléon a prisoner is deemed guilty until proven innocent, and Joséphine, now relieved of her guilty burden, which had been delivered at the Clinique St. Joseph with the assistance of the same nuns who had stood as witnesses to her irreproachable character, appeared in court as a murderess.

Never had she given a better demonstration of what it is like to be a *manifestation de la nature*. Seated between two *sergents de ville*, she was dressed as a widow. She wore yards of cheap crape, with a tiny frill of white to frame her large-featured, florid beauty. Most of the time she sat with bowed head, but occasionally she burst into dry, silent sobs.

During the questioning several interesting and somewhat damning facts

came out. She was forced to admit that she was not quite certain whether it had been the coal man or the sergeant who was really the cause of her downfall. At this admission the prosecutor, a small, thin man with enormous handlebar mustaches, asked her, with practical French logic, why, when the sergeant refused to marry her, she had not tried to get the coal man, or even the corporal, who had appeared dimly in the background of the testimony. This, he thought, was a less painful course than murder.

Then Joséphine, after repeating tearfully that she was not guilty of murder but that the sergeant had killed himself rather than marry her, revealed herself in her true light, as a social climber. "I wanted to marry an officer," she said. "Anyone can marry a *porteur de charbon*."

The trial lasted three days. Monsieur and Madame Verdeau and the Baron de Maricourt were all forced to appear, flustered, scandalized, but delighted, to testify. Joséphine, in her widow's weeds, continued to play the rôle of a stricken Rubens widow, and to the unworldly, provincial taste of the jury this rôle made a great appeal. On the final day of the trial a notoriously lecherous elderly shopkeeper in the front row was observed in tears.

Joséphine was acquitted, principally, I think, on the ground that although she herself had purchased the lethal instrument, no one was able to disprove her story that the sergeant wrested it from her hands when she meant to use it on herself and had destroyed himself rather than marry her. It was one of those cases in which the whole community believed the defendant guilty, but there was nothing to be done about it.

The outrage of the two Marias surpassed description. They raised their arms to heaven. The damage to crockery and glassware reached new and unbelievable proportions. In short, their tantrums, their tyranny, their power of destruction became unendurable and they were fired. This, too, they took bitterly, calling upon God to witness how the evil triumphed and the innocent were persecuted. We never really escaped Joséphine until we got rid of the two Marias. I doubt that *they* have got rid of *her* yet.

Two days after she walked out of court a free woman, Joséphine married the coal man. This was clearly a marriage of convenience, *faute de mieux*, for it lasted only a week or two, after which Joséphine, depositing the child in her mother's care, disappeared. When last seen, the *manifestation de la nature* was heading for Paris to cash in on her publicity.

CAN THE BLIND LEAD THE BLIND?

Ernest Bramah is generally credited with having invented the first modern blind detective, Max Carrados; but the most famous exponent in the contemporary field of blind detection is, without doubt, Captain Duncan Maclain, created by Baynard Kendrick. Mr. Kendrick acknowledges that it was the earlier blind detective who started him writing about Maclain — but for curious reasons . . . In Mr. Kendrick's opinion, Max Carrados had very strange powers that went far beyond the limits of credibility. For example, Carrados could run his fingertips along the surface of a newspaper, feel the infinitesimal height of printers' ink over the paper itself, and "read" any type larger than long primer. Mr. Kendrick questions that feat, and we must say we are inclined to side with Mr. Kendrick. Carrados, to give another example, could divine an exchange of private glances, expostulatory on one part, playfully defiant on the other. This feat, says Mr. Kendrick, would make any normal blind person, unequipped with such miraculous powers, feel like a fool; and again we must say we agree with Mr. Kendrick.

Indeed, Mr. Kendrick found it so difficult to swallow Max Carrados's supersensory accomplishments that he determined to create a blind detective of his own — a completely believable sleuth who could deduce by touch, hearing, taste, and smell, with no reliance whatever either on sight or sixth sense. And the simple truth of the matter is that while Baynard Kendrick has spent fifteen years of his life unearthing extraordinary things done by the totally blind, he has never had his blind detective do anything which he, Kendrick, had not actually seen done by a living blind man, or had fully authenticated.

When it came to developing the character of Duncan Maclain, Mr. Kendrick again went to the highest authority — real life. He patterned the character of Maclain on that of a real person — a young blind soldier in St. Dunstan's Home in London, who by touching the emblems on Kendrick's own uniform, accurately traced four years of Kendrick's Army career.

It is this sense of realistic "miracle," of thoroughly acceptable and

reasonable "blind magic," that has given the Duncan Maclain detective novels their impact, their fascination, and their stamp of authenticity. The Dunclain (a slip of the typewriter which we will let stand!) stories have been universally praised, not only by literary critics but by the keenest and most captious critics of all, blind readers themselves.

So, it is a genuine pleasure to bring you Baynard Kendrick's first short story about Captain Duncan Maclain — a story which won a Third Prize in EQMM's Seventh Annual Contest — an important "first" for which we have waited patiently these many years . . .

5 – 4 = MURDERER

by BAYNARD KENDRICK

THIRTY-FIVE YEARS OF BLINDNESS, and twenty-one years as a private investigator, had driven home one unassailable truth to Captain Duncan Maclain. He lived in a world of blackness, but it was lighted with hearing, touch, taste, and smell. To disregard any notion conveyed to his mind by those four keen senses working together, no matter how foolish it seemed for the moment, was to court trouble, and sometimes to invite death . . .

It lacked five minutes of midnight when Maclain got out of the heavy truck that had picked him up hitchhiking three miles away on 17-E, plodding carefully along with his left foot on the macadam and his right on the grassy shoulder. The friendly driver hadn't guessed he was blind, but had felt Maclain's urgency to reach a telephone.

"That's Nick's Diner over there." People were always uselessly pointing out places to Duncan Maclain. "This is the junction of 303 and 17-E. I'd pull up closer but I bogged there once. You can't put these trucks where you can put a car."

"Thanks a million," said Duncan Maclain.

The truck rolled off. Twenty minutes before, a December storm in the southland had broken with a freezing wind and an icy deluge. Using a stick he had cut in the woods as an emergency cane, the captain stepped out swiftly toward the smell of the diner, strong on the breeze through the pouring rain.

He was miserable, and strung as taut as an overtuned wire. A long-distance call from Philip Barstow, the state's attorney, had brought the captain without Schnucke, his Seeing-Eye dog, from New York to Red Platte that morning by plane. They'd driven 30 miles out to Barstow's one-room hunting cabin, and hunted quail all day. Barstow was one of the captain's oldest friends, and he was never

surprised at Maclain's ability to knock down three out of five singles, shooting merely at the sound.

There had been trouble and graft in the State Police, according to Phil Barstow, and the Crime Commission had started a probe on four recent unsolved shootings and on the unrestrained gambling in the vicinity. Colonel William Yerkes, in charge of the State Police, had finally asked Barstow to call in Duncan Maclain. A blind man interested in criminology, looking over the workings of the department, could accomplish more than any sighted investigator, in Yerkes's estimation.

Then, sitting over highballs after dinner in the hunting camp, Phil Barstow had toppled out of his chair, seized with a sudden heart attack just as he started to explain. He had given the captain Yerkes's private telephone number, 3–2111, and that was about all.

It was the start of a vivid grueling nightmare for Duncan Maclain. He had made Phil Barstow as comfortable as he could, and then left the camp in a panic. Working with his braille hunting-case compass, and following the sand woods-road with a foot in one six-inch deep rut, he had by some miracle of direction made the state road, 17-E, by 11:30.

His cigarettes, holder, and lighter were on the table when Barstow fell. His wallet, with identification card and money, was in a pocket of his hunting jacket hanging on the cabin wall. A search of his hunting pants and the pockets of the ancient woollen shirt he wore rewarded him with a badly rumpled handkerchief and a single dime. That, at least, was a break, for when he reached a phone he could make his call.

Exactly 96 steps from the truck his improvised cane struck an artificial hedge in front of the diner. The captain found an opening a little to his right, took two steps up, and briefly stood listening before he went in.

It might have been a cough he'd heard, or the clearing of a throat. It might have been imagination carried to his overstrung nerves and tired body on the driving rain and rising wind. Whatever it was, it conveyed a feeling of being watched. His listening brought no recurrence. He shrugged and dismissed it as he opened the door and went in.

Nobody spoke and he heard no breathing. He took two steps forward and found the counter. Muffled sounds of running water and the clatter of dishes drifted in toward him — from a pantry, probably, with a swinging-door entrance in back of the counter.

He followed thirteen stools to the right and found a cigarette machine partly blocking a window. A hinged flap there gave a passage through the counter.

He retraced his steps to where he had started and walked on down to the other end, twelve stools more. There he found a telephone booth.

He went inside and shut the door and sat for a space holding on to his

dime. A call to Colonel Yerkes would solve everything — get a police car to pick him up at Nick's Diner and dispatch an ambulance to the camp for Phil. It would also do something else — tie Duncan Maclain and Yerkes inextricably together. Maclain was supposed to be looking over the department on his own as Barstow's friend. He wasn't supposed to know the colonel, and didn't. The uncanny judgment that had made the captain what he was, told him in every fiber that to call the colonel was wrong.

He put in his dime, dialed the operator, and asked for the Chief, saying he wanted to report an emergency call.

When he hung up he felt certain an ambulance would get to the camp for Phil and that the Red Platte Hotel would send a car for him. He had explained everything to the chief operator. There was always one great light burning steadily through the blackness, the friendliness of all the world to people who couldn't see.

His dime had even been returned. It would buy a cup of coffee. He put it in his pocket and sat for a space with his forehead wrinkled.

Life was full of patterns to Duncan Maclain and the pattern of the phone booth seemed somehow awry. His hand went over the dial box and paused on top. A double bell was there. That seemed natural enough, although different from the type of dial box he knew in New York. But under the shelf where the telephone sat he found two more boxes fastened to the phone-booth wall. Each of the boxes had bells on top — bells of different shape, designed to give a different sound. It was those boxes that had been cramping him since he first sat down, pressing up against his knee.

He came out, found a stool near the phone booth, and sat down; then he called out, quite loudly, "Hello, is there anybody here?"

"Who do you think I am?" a voice demanded from behind the counter farther down. "Do you think I'm deaf or can't you see?"

"The last one's right," said Duncan Maclain. "I'm blind."

"Well, whatta ya know!"

Steps came toward him in back of the counter. He was conscious of an odor of pomade and clothes long impregnated with cooking. Someone breathed on him — a short man from the location of his head, and heavy, judging from the weight of his steps as he walked along the duckboards in back of the counter. The captain was suddenly conscious of his two-day growth of beard, his damp ragged shirt, and tousled hair.

"You must be that blind guy who goes hunting with Phil Barstow."

"That's right." The captain held out his hand. "I'm Duncan Maclain."

"Well, whatta ya know! I'm Nick Gherigis. I own the joint."

A pudgy hand, freshly wiped but not too dry of dishwater, shook the captain's, confirming his estimation of Nick's height and girth by its feel.

"Phil's been stopping in here for

over ten years now. Where is he?"

The captain told Nick what had happened.

"Well, whatta ya know!" said Nick Gherigis. "My old lady's got a bum ticker, too. We live out in back. She's having to take it easy. Usually she helps, but right now all the work is on me. I'd drive you back to the camp now, but I don't like to leave her."

"I feel sure the ambulance will get there," Maclain told him.

"It'll get there for Barstow. He's the big wheel around here. You hungry?"

"Plenty."

"I'll fix you up some ham and eggs."

"I only have a dime with me."

"Skip it," Nick said. "Phil will pay me if you don't." He hesitated briefly. "Hell, I suppose if you can shoot a bird you can eat ham and eggs without me feeding you."

The captain said, "I usually manage to find my mouth."

The telephone rang in the booth.

"Shall I answer that for you?" Maclain got up from his stool.

Nick said, "Let it ring. The joint's closed. It's ten past 12. If you'll excuse me a minute I think the old lady's calling me."

Over the intermittent ringing the captain heard the swish of a swinging door. He could follow Nick for a few quick steps. The phone bell rang again and at its pause he felt quite certain that out in the pantry Nick had closed another door.

Maclain sat down on a stool right by the booth. A quick thought struck him that someone might be calling him at Nick's — from the hospital or hotel. Cursing his own stupidity, he reached in the booth without leaving the stool, found the receiver, and put it to his ear.

Nick's voice came over the telephone, trembling in intensity: "A hundred a week is cleaning me now. I'll blow the works before I'll double it. Kate don't know nothing, but I'm leaving her a list that'll jail everyone in the whole damn state if anything happens to me. Now go to hell!"

When the swinging door swished as Nick came back, the captain was sitting with his elbows on the counter.

There was a tinkle of keys, the snip of a lock, and the unmistakable ring of a bell and slide of a drawer as the cash register opened. A clink of change followed, and the crisp dry rustle of currency. Then came the tap of bills being straightened on edge against the top of the counter.

Nick went back through the swinging door. An instant later something clanged.

An atmosphere of menace had suddenly seeped into the diner. The captain was as sensitive to the coming of trouble as he was to the brewing of a storm. Nick was frightened. His voice and words had told all that on the extension of the pay phone. Now, after locking the cash register up for the night, he'd opened it again and removed all the money to hide it somewhere in the pantry.

"I hope he'll trust me for some cigarettes," muttered Maclain.

Nick came back, shut the cash register drawer, and said, "It's a helluva night. If that car don't show from the hotel, you'd better stay here. There's an extra little room at the back. It ain't much, but it's dry. I'll fix your eats."

Gas popped under a grill, ignited from the pilot light that Nick turned on. It was followed by the soft slap of a piece of ham tossed on the grill. The captain heard the crack of eggs against the edge of a bowl, and a second later, a comforting sizzle.

The captain nerved himself, as if for a great ordeal. "I left my cigarettes at the camp — with all my money. I hate to impose on your kindness, but I was wondering —"

"Name your brand," Nick said.

Then it happened.

Accompanied by a gust of wind, someone came through the diner door, about ten stools from where Maclain was sitting. In a voice that was high with terror, a woman screamed from behind the swinging door: "Nicky, don't shoot! Don't kill anyone!"

A gun went off, firing three times. The muffled footsteps of slippered feet stumbled off in the pantry.

Nick went down, slithering more than falling, collapsing forever with the feeble dead flap of his pudgy hand against the counter.

The captain sat like a man of bronze, his cup half-raised. Any second the gun would go off again and his own career would be finished.

Unhurried footsteps walked away — toward the other end of the diner where the cigarette machine stood. The captain listened, counting, and let a sound-etched photograph developed in his brain of a man about the size of Nick, with an overcoat rapping against his legs.

The captain remembered the hinged counter-flap. He heard it raised, and he could feel the vibrations as the man swung it over and dropped it against the counter.

He counted the footsteps along the duckboards and jumped involuntarily at the sound of the bell and the opening of the cash drawer.

For three long seconds he listened to heavy and muffled breathing, as the man stared in the drawer. The captain knew then why the man hadn't shot him.

The man was masked with something covering his nose and mouth — a handkerchief perhaps. He couldn't know Maclain was blind, but he didn't care; he couldn't be recognized.

The clank of metal sounded from the duckboards near where the captain figured Nick lay. "He's disposed of the gun beside his victim," the captain thought, and wondered why.

The heavy footsteps retraced their course, paused for a second inside the door, then went on out.

For 30 seconds the captain waited, tense and listening. There had been no sound of a car.

He set his coffee cup down and began to function again. When he knew his way, he could move much faster than most sighted people. He went to the end of the counter and through

the opening almost on a run. Then he grew more cautious. He felt along, with his fingers brushing shelves of condiments and canned goods, until he reached the swinging door. As he had already pictured, a large round porthole of glass was set in the door.

The woman who had screamed was undoubtedly Mrs. Gherigis. She must have seen the gunman through the window in the door. The captain figured swiftly that she couldn't have seen Nick standing in front of the grill out of range of vision.

Why had she screamed, "Nicky, don't shoot! Don't kill anyone!"?

The captain snapped his fingers in sudden understanding. The masked killer must have been wearing some of Nick's clothes. Mrs. Gherigis didn't know her husband had been shot — she had thought *he* was the killer!

"Of whom?"

Obviously the man, whoever he was, who was shaking Nick down.

The aroma of the cooking ham and eggs grew sharper, mixed with the smell of the simmering coffee.

If Duncan Maclain knew any fear, it was that of fire. With even greater caution, he located the gas knob and turned off the grill.

His foot touched Nick's head. The captain knelt and let his perceptive fingers roam lightly over Nick's body. The gunman was an expert and he had shot to kill, wasting nothing. All three bullets had hit, one in Nick's stomach, one in his mouth, and one in his eye.

Water was gurgling softly in the Monel-metal sink, under the counter close by the captain's head. He cleansed the blood from his fingers.

Anxious now to check the accuracy of his hearing, he felt around Nick's body until he found the gun. With his hand resting on it, he froze.

The swinging door had opened gently behind him, but that wasn't the sound that held him rigid. It was the unmistakable click of a hammer as someone cocked a .38 revolver.

"Mrs. Gherigis?" a man's voice called out.

The captain made no move to turn.

"You there! Don't bother to look around — just leave that automatic where it is. Stand up slowly and put your hands behind you. I'm Corporal Walsh of the state police and I've got you covered."

The captain obeyed. The chill of steel on his wrists was cold as Walsh snapped handcuffs on. He felt himself frisked by an expert hand that relieved him of his pocket knife and laid it on the counter. The frisking seemed to throw Maclain off balance and he leaned against Walsh to right himself. Walsh was tall and thin, and he pushed the captain angrily away.

Then Walsh yelled, "Burzak — come in here!"

A blast of icy wind struck the captain as another man came in.

Seconds ticked by, then Burzak asked, "Isn't that the guy that got off the truck?"

"The same," said Walsh. "Get Lieutenant Corman personally on the phone and tell him exactly what hap-

pened — that we were parked down there on 303 at the crossroads, saw this man get off the truck, and were watching the place when we heard the shots. We drove up with our lights off and nailed him."

"Efficiently, too," muttered Duncan Maclain. "I was so busy checking my marvelous powers of hearing that I didn't hear you fellows come."

The captain's braille-watch said five to 1. The two police cars, with Lieutenant Corman and his three technicians from Homicide, had rolled up twenty minutes before. The captain had heard them brake to a stop.

Corman was thickset, quiet, efficient, and deadly. It hadn't been very difficult to identify himself to Corman. The lieutenant had checked by phone with the hospital and found that an ambulance was on its way to Barstow. Then he had checked with the Red Platte Hotel and learned that they had not yet been able to send a car out to Nick's because of the storm. "Cancel it," Corman told them smoothly. "We'll bring him in."

"Dead or alive," thought Maclain.

Corman had then ordered the captain's handcuffs taken off and had grown quite friendly.

The captain sat on a stool, with Corman next to him, between him and the door, and listened to the pop of another flashlight bulb. The measurements, photographing, and fingerprinting were almost finished. The ambulance and intern would arrive any minute to cart Nick away.

"Mrs. Gherigis killed her husband," said Duncan Maclain. "Make a ten-minute tour of the place with me and I'll show you how."

"That's a hot one," said Burzak from farther down. "The lieutenant just got through talking to her in back. She says you were the only one in the diner. She was looking through that glass in the swinging door and saw you shoot the gun."

"Which narrows it down to her word against mine," said Maclain. "But she made one mistake — a big one — in picking me for a witness while she tried to look like a man. She thought I was a bum who had wandered in here and that my story would be disbelieved. What she overlooked was that I couldn't have shot him and couldn't even see her, because I'm totally blind."

Corman stood up. "I'll make a tour with you. If you can make that story stick, Maclain, it's the very first thing I've heard that sounds like sense."

There were two things in the pantry that interested Duncan Maclain — a big deep-freeze that clanged when the lid dropped down, and a closet. The closet door stood ajar and had a Yale lock on it. What caught Maclain up was the fact that the door was lined with heavy asbestos.

"There's nothing in there but supplies and beer," said Corman. "We've already looked around. Nick had it insulated against moisture."

Duncan Maclain was already inside the closet, his fingers traveling along the wall and back of the stacked-up

cases of beer. The wires he was searching for led up in back of the shelves. He came out and checked the Yale lock again, making sure it was on the thumb latch and that even if the door were shut it would open without the key.

"When I search for things," said Duncan Maclain, "I first have to find where they aren't. That's what proves to me that my thinking is right." He hooked his fingers on Corman's arm. "The washroom seems to be the logical place. Let's look there."

Two coats and a hat were hanging in the washroom, with four of Nick's soiled aprons and two suits of his overalls. Corman stood in silence as the captain's fingers brushed them all. For twelve inches up from the bottom of the legs, one of the suits of white overalls was damp and muddy.

"Those were what Mrs. Gherigis wore when she did the shooting." The captain pointed to the hat and one of the overcoats and the muddy overalls. "They're damp and Nick hasn't been out of this place since the rain started. I think if you turn them over to your technicians, lieutenant, and check the sweatband in that hat, you can prove that's what Mrs. Gherigis had on."

"Well, I'll be —" said Corman. "I'll take them now."

"No, wait." The captain stretched out his hand. "Take me out and around in front. There's a hedge out there. I felt it coming in. I'll show you how she got in and out of the diner and yet was not seen by Walsh and Burzak in their car."

They came out of the washroom, and a couple of steps to the right Corman opened another door.

"There's a storm vestibule here," Corman said. He opened a second door, letting in a gust of wind and rain. "Wait here a second," Corman went on. "We'll get drowned in this. I'll get the slickers from Walsh's car." Corman went out.

The captain raised both his sensitive hands and swept them up and down along each side of the inner vestibule door. It was the logical place to put an electric meter, fuse box, and cut-out switch for the diner. He grunted in satisfaction as he found them.

An automobile door slammed and Corman came back with two slickers. They put them on and went out into the rain.

He struck the fronds of the prickly hedge in front of the diner a few feet farther on. It ran from the end of the diner to the door. It was more than head-high and planted about eighteen inches out from the diner wall.

"Have you a flashlight, lieutenant?"

"Yes."

"Shine it in back of this hedge and see if there are any footprints."

"There's nothing but water," Corman said. "It's an inch deep, at least."

"Well, that's one up for Mrs. Gherigis," said Duncan Maclain. "Let's follow briefly what she did. You'll find when you make an investigation that Nick Gherigis had been paying out dough."

"To whom?" Corman rasped.

"To a dame," said the captain. "I have very keen ears. Mrs. Gherigis called Nick in while I was in the diner, and I heard them quarreling. He's been keeping a woman some place and it's been on her mind for a long time. Tonight was the finish.

"She went in back and got Nick's gun, put on his white overalls, hat, and coat in the washroom, came around here in back of this hedge, shot him, and went back the same way, leaving the clothes in the washroom. With only Nick and me and her in the diner, she felt sure you'd hang it on me — a bum."

"I'll buy it," Corman said suddenly. "Driving up here from the road with their lights off, Walsh and Burzak couldn't have seen her from the police car."

There was a swish of tires and a splashing of water as a heavy car turned from 17-E to stop in front of the diner.

Corman said, "We might as well go inside. The morgue wagon is here."

"Do you mind if I talk with Mrs. Gherigis?" the captain asked.

"Go ahead," said Corman.

The captain stood and listened while two men carrying a stretcher went in through the diner door. Corman went in with them.

When the granite of anger set in Maclain, he ceased to be a human being and turned into a machine. He was blind, but with the inexorable blindness of justice. He hated a killer, but in his code there were worse . . .

Maclain was part of the rain and the raging wind as he took the keys from Corman's car and the ambulance. There were none in the car that had brought the technicians, so the captain swiftly raised the hood of that car and jerked the distributor wires loose, disabling the machine. A moment later he sped around the diner and was down on all fours, crawling about to pat the ground beside and underneath Walsh's and Burzak's official car. Then he got to his feet, opened the door, and removed the keys.

Beside him, Burzak's gritty voice said suddenly, "What are you doing?"

"I was about to put your slicker back in," said Duncan Maclain.

"Wait till Walsh hears this one," Burzak said. "You lying bum, I knew that you could see!"

The captain hit him, one straight right, backed with one hundred and ninety pounds of fury. It landed just an inch and a half underneath the sound of Burzak's words.

He slid out of the dripping slicker and draped it over the fallen trooper, then stepped into the vestibule and pulled the main light-switch beside the door. His feet made no noise as he sped past the washroom, across the pantry, into the insulated closet.

There wasn't even the tiniest snip as he shut himself in by pushing up the button and releasing the Yale lock on the inside of the door. He brailled the closet with frantic speed and stopped with every sense alert at three big, round cans set together on a shelf before him.

They were fastened with little tin hasps, like those on a bread box. The captain tried to lift a can and found it wouldn't move. He opened the hasp and raised the lid to stick in a probing finger. Sugar — but only on top! His finger had struck a metal bottom less than an inch and a half down.

He shut the top and twisted the can around. It was cut out at the back and set in a groove. He hadn't been wrong when he had traced the wires. He reached inside and lifted from its cradle the combination mouth-and-earpiece of a French-style telephone.

The dial signal clicked in his ear and settled to a buzzing sound. Maclain reached in through the opening and dialed 3–2111.

"Colonel Yerkes?"

"Yes. Who is it?" The colonel's voice sounded sleepy.

"It's Duncan Maclain. Phil Barstow's —"

"I know all about you." The voice was wide awake now. "I thought you were out at Barstow's camp."

"Do you know Nick's Diner?"

"Of course!"

"Fine," said Maclain. "Then get together six of your best men — ones you're positive you can trust. Arm them to the ears and get out here as fast as you can. Nick was shot an hour ago by one of your own troopers — Burzak — while Corporal Walsh was waiting outside in the car."

"Good Lord!" said Yerkes. "Why?"

"Nick was running a wire room, receiving and sending bets on the races. He has an extension to the pay booth and two dial phones concealed in a sound-proof room off the pantry. I'm locked in and telephoning from it."

"Who else is at the diner?"

"Lieutenant Corman, three technicians, two men from the morgue, Walsh and Burzak, and Mrs. Gherigis," said Maclain. "None of them are leaving — I have all the car keys. At the moment they're probably hunting for me. I put out all the lights in the place and I had to knock Trooper Burzak cold when he started to move their police car."

"Can you hold it a minute?" Yerkes demanded. "I've got another phone here. I'm going to start out the riot car. Hang on!"

The colonel was back in a few moments. "Tell me briefly what happened and I'll be right along. The riot squad is already on its way."

"Phil had a heart attack," said Duncan Maclain. "I came here to get to a phone. An ambulance is on its way to pick up Phil.

"Walsh and Burzak were parked outside by the end of the diner, where I couldn't have seen them even if I had eyes. But they saw me come in. The telephone rang and Nick left to take the call in this closet, where I am now. He told me he'd heard his wife call. I thought somebody might be phoning me back about the ambulance for Phil, so I picked up the phone in the booth.

"Nick was on the extension and I overheard part of the call. He said that a hundred a week was cleaning him and he'd blow the works before

he'd double it. He said he was leaving his wife a list that would jail them all."

"You don't know who he was talking to?"

"I don't," said Maclain. "Maybe Corman."

"What makes you think that?"

"It's an idea I got when Walsh told Burzak to get Lieutenant Corman personally and to tell him exactly what had happened — that they had been parked down there on 303 at the crossroads, had seen me get off the truck, had driven up with their lights off, and had nailed me. It sounded like an awful lot of yackety-yak to send in on a murder call."

"Do you have any proof, Captain Maclain?" Yerkes's voice was grim.

"Plenty, but I haven't much time to tell you — somebody has just started pounding on the door. I guess they've got the lights back on.

"Walsh and Burzak saw me come in, decided it was a good time to rub out Nick and hang it on someone they thought was only a bum. Right now I look like one. Burzak put on Nick's hat, coat, and overalls — he found them in the washroom inside the side entrance. Then he came around through the front, shot Nick, and took a look in the cash register. I think he wanted that list Nick had talked about, but Nick had cleaned out the cash drawer and hidden the stuff after the warning call.

"Burzak was scarcely out of the diner when Walsh came in and put me under a gun. It was the world's fastest piece of police work, Colonel.

"Anyway, Burzak had dressed up to look like Nick and had blasted him. Mrs. Gherigis saw a man through the window of the pantry door and thought it was Nick. She still doesn't know Nick's dead."

"You sound pretty sure, Maclain."

"Of course I'm sure; get this, Colonel: five of us were here. Nick was shot. Mrs. Gherigis couldn't have done it — she was back of a door and out of range of vision. I didn't, and Walsh is tall and thin — too tall to get Nick's things on and be mistaken for him by Nick's wife. Five minus four equals one — Burzak."

"Just a second, Captain Maclain. What evidence have you got?"

"I think you'll find Nick's list of names in the deep-freeze, Colonel — I heard the lid clang. Your laboratory can prove that Burzak had Nick's clothes on . . . I'd better hang up now — they're breaking the door."

"One more second," Yerkes pleaded. "Can you *prove* that Burzak and Walsh were there all the time — from *before* the murder?"

"I have to hurry, Colonel. Burzak's and Walsh's police car hasn't moved from right beside this diner since before 11:30 when it started to rain. Everything around here is soaking, but it's bone dry under their car."

"I'll be right over," said Yerkes. "Is there anything I can bring you?"

"Cigarettes, Colonel," said Duncan Maclain, "I never did get any. And maybe just a wee drop of scotch. I'm dryer inside than the ground under Walsh's and Burzak's car."

The British edition of Howard Haycraft's MURDER FOR PLEASURE *(London: Davies, 1942) contained an Introduction by Nicholas Blake, "a foremost 'new generation' English detective story writer, the author of such a fine novel as* THE BEAST MUST DIE." *Nicholas Blake is also well-known to American readers for his poetry which is published under his real name, C. Day Lewis. Now, in his Introduction to* MURDER FOR PLEASURE, *Nicholas Blake asked some provocative questions and offered some evocative answers. Concerning the possible fate of the detective novel as we know it today, Mr. Blake had this to say: ". . . the traditional pattern of the detective novel would be disintegrated if writers emphasized the fact that the criminal does, unconsciously, hunt himself down. The fictional detective's occupation would indeed be gone. Perhaps this is the direction we are to move in. Perhaps the detective story, as we know it, will be supplanted by the crime novel. If so, future generations will look back on Simenon and Iles as the fathers of the new genre . . ."*

Here is a perfect example, in the short-story length, of what Francis Iles may have been the father of: a story of crime rather than of detection; a story, to quote from Francis Iles's own credo, that is not "crime-puzzle pure and simple," that holds "its readers less by mathematical than by psychological ties," that is "a puzzle of character rather than a puzzle of time, place, motive, and opportunity."

THE COWARD

by FRANCIS ILES

THIS IS THE STORY THAT WAS TOLD me by a complete stranger one wet morning at the Dodo Club.

I do not know what the qualifications are for membership of the Dodo, but I believe the club was founded as a kind of carry-over on a permanent basis of one of those ephemeral clublets which contribute so much to the charm of social life at the older universities. At any rate, most of the members were youngish — that is to say, on the undeveloped side of 40 — their number was small, and, according to George Pidcock, each of them was a distinguished man in some modest way of his own; though what claim to distinction George himself could have put forward, beyond being a first cousin of mine, I could never imagine.

In any case, it was to lunch with

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George that I was there on that morning, and it was because the day was wet that I arrived more than an hour early. The hall porter at the Dodo knows me; and the morning room into which they show visitors is well provided with those more obscure periodicals (to be seen only in clubs) which have a peculiar fascination for me; therefore, I looked forward to quite a pleasant hour of relaxation before the exacting job of being entertained by George for lunch.

But I was out of luck — all my favorite magazines were missing.

I must have vented my chagrin aloud, for the next moment I was horrified to see an inquiring head come into view round the wing of an armchair and fix on me the usual baleful eye of the Disturbed Member.

"Were you looking for anything?" asked the head.

"No," I said. "No, no. Not at all. Nothing. Oh, no."

He got up and I saw with incredulity that his eye was not baleful at all but concerned, with the concern of a host for a guest. "I'm really afraid you were looking for something. What was it?"

"*Retrogressional Advancement*," I said.

With a peculiarly attractive look of guilt he indicated the copy in his own hand. "I'm so sorry," he was beginning, when suddenly his expression changed and he looked quite startled. "Good Lord, are you really a Retrogressional Advancer? They positively do exist, then? 'Pon my word, I thought the whole thing must be a leg-pull. I say, I didn't mean that. Of course . . . most extraordinarily interesting. . . . Quite see there may be something in it. . . . H'm . . ."

I put him out of his agony.

And then, of course, he ordered sherry, and asked whom I was waiting for, ordered more sherry on hearing that it was George Pidcock, confessed to never having heard of George Pidcock, and finally ordered more sherry as a penance for never having heard of me either. In short, within a very short time we were getting ready to tell each other the stories of our lives: which for two complete strangers, and members of a normally reticent race, was remarkable enough.

It was, however, not until he learned that I was a writer that this excellent man began to show signs of human weakness. They were signs I knew too well. I had fled from them at cocktail parties, at week-end parties, in the homes even of elderly relatives. They are indications that the sign-maker has a "plot" for a story: either "just a little thing, you probably won't think much of it, came to me in my bath this morning," or "and absolutely true, you'd hardly need to alter it; honestly, someone ought to write it up."

Usually, I say, the only thing to do is to flee (unless you happen to be particularly good at the glassy smile, the mandarin nod, and all the rest of it); but this time things were different. After all, this man had not read me the riot act, as he had been entitled to

do; instead he had fed me with kindness and gladdened me with sherry. Besides, I liked his looks. So I did as never before since the days of my apprenticeship: I encouraged him.

Curiously, it needed encouragement to bring his tale out of him. When it came to the point, he showed diffidence. I encouraged him further.

"No, no," he said. "It's not that. I was just wondering whether I haven't been a bit — what's the word? — precipitate. After all, it's rather . . . What's the word again? I'm afraid you'll think me only half-educated. I suppose *you* can hit on the right word every time."

I assured him I could not.

"Well, 'confidential,' then. No, not 'confidential.' 'Intimate,' that's more like it. Yes, it's a bit intimate. Rather gives a fellow away, I mean. Not that the . . . the chap who told me put me under any injunction not to repeat it. I mean, there's no seal of secrecy, but . . . Anyhow, I tell you what I'll do. I'll tell you the story exactly as it happened . . . that is, as it was told to me, of course . . . and if it's any use to you, it's up to you to twist things round a bit so that it's not too absolutely obvious. How's that?"

"Fair enough," I said. "And you must give your informant a fictitious name, mustn't you?"

"By Jove, yes. That's an idea. Of course I must. I say, that's worth a couple more sherries, don't you think?" He got up and rang the bell. "Smith! That's what we'll call him. Smith, yes. Jolly good. Smith! Well, it was in the last war. About the middle of the war. This chap Smith had got a spot of leave. He was a young subaltern then in . . . Oh, well, better not mention his regiment, but his battalion was quartered at the time in one of the more deadly regions of Yorkshire; and believe me, Yorkshire lover as I am, some bits can be grim."

"I've been stationed in Catterick Camp myself," I told him.

"Ah, well, you can sympathize with Smith. You see, his leave came at just the wrong time. He was engaged to a girl in London . . . grand girl and all that, much too good for him (so Smith says, of course!) . . . but she was some sort of big noise in the W.R.N.S. and was going to be up to the eyebrows in it all that week; couldn't give the poor chap two minutes in all his eight days.

"So what do you think the poor boob did? He went to Brighton. You see, he'd got some pretty good memories of Brighton, before the war. For instance . . . Oh, well, no need to go into that. Point is, he went to Brighton. And, believe me, to go to Brighton in wartime was asking for trouble. Well . . . he got it.

"He put up at the good old Cosmopolitan, and there wasn't anything wrong with *that*, except that all the waiters were 90 years old and could only just about crawl on their hands and knees, and the food restrictions were too much even for their chef, and the fuel orders left the place freezing, and he was about the only guest

in the whole blessed mausoleum. But outside it really was . . . Well, poor old Smith could hardly recognize the place as Brighton at all. Dead, damned, and deserted. A few giddy whirls of barbed wire along the front, practically all the hotels and boarding houses closed, not a sign of life in the place, nothing but rain, wind, and general misery, and all the general foulness of an early English spring.

"I mean, you can see this chap Smith looking out of his hotel bedroom (the lounge being too cold to sit in), over a gray sea, with the gulls screeching dismally past his window and Smith feeling he could screech with them and wondering what the blazes had made him come to such a godforsaken place and how the blazes he was going to stick it for six more whole days. Ever see Brighton during the war, when the restrictions were on? Well, believe me, it was a bit grim. Poor old Brighton!

"Anyhow, there's always the pictures. So Smith put on his greatcoat and went downstairs to get hold of a local paper and find out what was on. And, of course, when he did find the list, there wasn't a film that he hadn't seen before — and thought pretty poorly of when he did see it! That was how it would be, of course. It was that sort of leave.

"So Smith fell back on the last resource of the utterly bored. He read the local paper. And when he'd read what there was to read, dash it if he didn't read the advertisements, too. I mean, you can judge what his state was by then. So when he saw a rather amusing advertisement in that local rag, you'll understand that he was just about in the right frame of mind to do something about it.

"So far as I can remember . . . I mean, so far as I remember Smith's words, the advertisement went something like this: 'Young Lady has Sporting Prints for Sale. Number Something-or-other Such-and-such Street.' Something like that, anyhow.

"Now for some reason this made Smith prick his ears up. It sounded . . . Well, why 'sporting prints'? And why go out of the way to rub in 'young lady'? Smith couldn't help feeling there was something queer about it. And he remembered there's some kind of American joke about 'etchings'; never been able to make out quite what it is, but you find it in any American comic paper you pick up. The more he turned it over, the more it seemed to him that this young lady, with her sporting prints, ought to be investigated. Of course, there wasn't a thought of disloyalty to his fiancée. Smith, understand, was an ordinarily decent chap. Besides, he knew she couldn't help not being available: duty before devotion, and all that. But just a pleasant chat or so, and perhaps a personable face to share a bit of war food with . . . there couldn't be any harm in that. So he grabbed his cap and left. I can tell you, he was in the mood.

"Well, he found the street all right, and Smith didn't think it was much of a street for a young lady to live in;

a sort of mixture of cheap little shops, cheap boarding houses, and pubs. The number given in the advertisement didn't impress Smith either. At first he thought it was a tobacconist's shop. Then he saw there was a side door, half-open to show a glimpse of a flight of dark, steep, and rather dirty stairs. Evidently the young lady lived in the maisonette above the shop, and Smith was beginning to wonder if she were really a very nice young lady.

"He didn't care much for the occupant of the shop, either. In fact, it gave him quite a nasty jar, as he was hesitating outside the door, to see a fat little man squatting behind the counter like . . . like a kind of obscene frog, you know, and watching him with beady, bright eyes that never winked. I mean, it quite put Smith off his stroke. Perhaps he had a bit of a guilty conscience already. I don't know. Anyhow . . .

"Smith had one queer — what's the word? — foible, I think. I mean, if there was anything he didn't like, or that frightened him, he . . . well, he sort of went for it bald-headed. You know . . . without giving himself time to think. It was a form of funk really, though Smith didn't know it then. Anyhow, that's what he did."

My stranger paused and sipped his sherry. In his eyes was a curious look which I couldn't quite define.

"Smith went up those stairs?" I prompted him, for I was eager to know.

"Oh, yes, Smith went up those stairs." He smiled. "There was the usual wooden partition of the converted maisonette at the top; you know — before you reach the landing, so that you have to ring the bell from a stair below. Very awkward, I always think. Anyhow, Smith rang — and waited. He was really quite a bit excited now, you'll understand. Those 'sporting prints' were looking even more significant to him now that he'd seen the young lady's surroundings than they had in the lounge of the Cosmopolitan. And he was excited because he wasn't used to this sort of thing — I mean, calling on strange 'young ladies' in dingy maisonettes. It was definitely an Adventure, with a capital A.

"After a time he heard a door open inside, and then the flap of the letter box was lifted and a girl's voice said, 'Who is it?'

"Smith explained hurriedly that he'd called in answer to the advertisement, and there was a pause. Then the girl inside said, 'Oh! Well . . . I'm just having a bath. Could you possibly come back in about half an hour?'

"I told you Smith was a bit young in those days. It didn't occur to him to offer to help with the bath, or get the towels warm, or anything. He just said he'd be delighted to come back in half an hour, and went downstairs again like a little gentleman. As a matter of fact, he was thinking what a charming voice it had been. He hadn't really expected that, and it put an edge on his curiosity. He wouldn't have missed his return visit now for wild horses.

"He stopped at the street door to light a cigarette, and noticed that the fat, little man wasn't in his shop; and for some reason that pleased him. It would have looked as if the girl had turned him down, you see, and he didn't like the idea of the little frog chuckling over that.

"Well, Smith went out and took a walk. Then, when his half-hour was up, he wasted no time in getting back — and his keenness hadn't lost anything by the delay.

"It was past shop hours by now, and Smith noticed as he passed that the tobacconist had closed his shop; he was glad those beady eyes wouldn't follow him again. He positively jumped up those stairs in spite of the darkness, and you can be pretty sure that by this time Smith wasn't nearly so bored with Brighton as he had been.

"At the top of the stairs he pulled out his cigarette lighter to find the bell, and then he noticed a queer thing: the door wasn't closed. Still, he couldn't walk in, of course, so he rang. No reply. He rang again. Still no reply. Then he wondered: was it possible that the girl had had to run out for a few minutes, and had left the door ajar especially for him?

"Now, I ought to tell you — you'll find out soon enough in any case — that this chap Smith was rather a timid sort of cove. I mean, hated doing the wrong thing, or shoving himself forward, or making himself conspicuous in any way. Feeble, of course, but there you are; that's how he was. So it took quite a bit of self-jolting before he could make up his mind to barge in through that open doorway and go on up the next flight of stairs.

"Probably it was only the thought of that cold, windy front, and the hardly less cold and drafty lounge at the Cosmopolitan, that finally made up his mind for him. Like a good few of us, perhaps, Smith loved Adventures with capital A's in theory but not quite so well in practice. Not an enterprising sort of bloke, you understand. Didn't pretend to be.

"Well, he didn't shut the door behind him, just pushed it to, much as it had been. The landing light above was on, but it was too dim to show beyond the door. The landing at the top of the stairs was furnished like a little hall. Smith hesitated there and gave a hoarse sort of croak, but there was no answer. There were two doors opening onto the landing, and one of them was ajar, with the light on inside it. So Smith sidled in."

My friend paused and sipped again; and this time I was careful to say nothing which might break his thread. His face, when he continued, was expressionless.

"It was a nice room. Quite large, but furnished to give an effect of solid coziness; shaded lights, big armchairs, and all that. I believe there was . . . I believe Smith said there was a divan, too: it was the sort of room where there would be a divan, and lots of cushions on it, too. But *not* a doll over the telephone. No, decidedly not dolls.

"The room brought Smith up with

rather a jerk. It wasn't the kind of room he had been expecting, you see. He had expected dolls. He stood irresolute just inside the door, wondering whether he hadn't better make a bolt for it while the going was good. He was pretty sure now that he had done the wrong thing.

"Then something caught his eye: a portfolio lying on a little rosewood table by one of the armchairs. His brain went click! 'Sporting prints!'

"Well, of course, Smith *had* done the right thing. And, of course, he'd known all the time really what those 'sporting prints' would be. He'd just deliberately been kidding himself, because if the advertisement had said 'feelthy pictures' he'd have known that no officer and gent, let alone the fiancé of a lady (in the Wrens), could possibly go chasing after them.

"Mind you, they weren't the limit. Just rather charming nudes — but with that very definite difference, if you know what I mean."

As a matter of fact I didn't, and murmured as much.

"Stockings," said my friend succinctly. He paused and smiled. "Ridiculous, really, isn't it?"

"Quite," I agreed. "But rather fun. And there has to be a difference, of course. So I suppose Smith, remembering he was an officer and gent, tiptoed away, and . . ."

"Eh?"

"I mean, everyone lived happily ever afterward."

Frankly, I was disappointed. The story had seemed to be leading up to something better than a glimpse of a few rude postcards. I wondered what all the fuss had been about.

"What?" My companion seemed puzzled.

"I mean, that's the end," I explained patiently.

"The end? Good heavens, no. I say, I *am* telling this rottenly. Why, we haven't got to the really interesting bit yet."

"We haven't? Then you're not telling it rottenly at all; you're telling it damned well. Carry on."

"I say, do you mean that? You really want me to go on?"

I assured him I did want just that, and after ringing the bell again he resumed:

"Well, as a matter of fact, you were right. Smith did remember that after all he was an officer and a little gent, and as the houri still didn't show herself, he prepared to depart — and I won't pretend he didn't feel he was doing a pretty noble job. In fact, I don't believe he'd absolutely made up his mind when he noticed a door which looked as if it ought to lead into the adjoining room, and he thought he might just as well take a peep in there before clearing out. No need for nice scruples now, you see. So he did. And . . . and . . ."

"Yes?" I prompted him.

My companion studied the nails of his left hand with nonchalance, but I could see that his whole arm was tensed. I wondered what was coming.

"There was a naked girl lying on the floor — dead," he said in a flat voice.

"Her throat had been cut. There was an awful lot of . . . blood."

"Good Lord!"

"Yes. It gave Smith . . . rather a shock."

"Well, naturally. What did he do?"

"That's just the point. What did he do? He beat it."

"Beat it?"

"Yes. Lost his head, I mean. Pretty rotten, don't you think?"

"Well," I said carefully, "I don't know about that. After all, you say he was young, and . . ."

"Yes, but not so young as all that. He ought to have rung up the police there and then. Of course he ought. But . . . don't you see the difficulty?"

I didn't, quite. "You mean, he didn't want, as an officer, to be mixed up in the murder of . . ."

"No, no! The point was, that little fat man had seen him go in the first time, but he hadn't seen him come out five minutes later. He hadn't seen him come back half an hour afterward. How was Smith going to prove that he hadn't been there all the time? He hadn't been back to his hotel, there probably wasn't a soul who could swear to having seen him. *How was Smith going to prove he hadn't cut the girl's throat himself?*"

"Oh, I see!" I said. "Yes, of course."

"As you say, Smith saw the point at once. And I can tell you, it made him sweat. After all, innocent men *have* been convicted . . . Or haven't they? And in any case, what could Smith do? The girl was dead . . . perfectly dead! Her murderer was probably with her when Smith first called. But Smith hadn't seen him. He couldn't tell the police anything useful. The case would have been just the same whether Smith had barged into the maisonette or not.

"Besides, there was more to it than that. Smith's own father was a member of an important government mission, and the girl he was engaged to had a big job in the Waafs . . ."

"As a matter of fact, you said the Wrens," I murmured.

He looked at me. "Did I? Well, really it was the Ats. Anyhow, her father was . . . Well, I'll just say that to certain newspapers the news of his daughter's fiancé being mixed up in that kind of scandal would have seemed just too good to be true. Or so Smith thought. So after sweating blood for a minute or two, trying to decide, he just grabbed up the portfolio and . . . beat it."

"Ah, he collected the portfolio?"

My tone was ironical, but the blue eyes my host turned on me were innocent. "Of course," he said. "It had his fingerprints."

Again I thought he had come to the end, for he paused and sipped thoughtfully at his sherry. But before I could make the appropriate comments, he was off again.

"Well, that was that. Smith beat it back to the Cosmopolitan and ordered a couple of the biggest drinks wartime Brighton could manage. He was pretty badly shaken. The portfolio was under his arm, underneath his

greatcoat, and I can tell you it was burning a hole in his side. As soon as he'd finished his drinks he went up to his bedroom, cut the thing to ribbons with his razor, and burned the strips in his empty fireplace. Have you ever tried to burn a few dozen shiny postcards? It's not so easy as it sounds. It seemed to Smith to take hours. And when it was done he got in a panic about the ashes, and daren't go down to dinner till he'd collected them all up and put them in one of the lavatories and flushed them down.

"Smith didn't enjoy his dinner much that evening.

"Perhaps it was stupid of him to get the wind up so badly, but . . . I don't know. It seemed to him that a terrible lot hung on it. Not merely himself, you see, but all those other people. There'd be just hell to pay. He could see the headlines: *Fiancé of minister's daughter held on murder charge — father in government — fiancé in jail.*

"I needn't tell you what sort of evening he spent. And the night! It was just hell. Smith's had a sympathy for criminals ever since. Waiting for that touch on the shoulder, you know . . . Well, it's true . . . even in one's sleep.

"He thought it all out — oh, half a million times! And by the morning he'd decided what to do. The obvious thing, he thought, was to get away from Brighton. The police would have his description — bound to! 'Tall young officer, wearing military greatcoat and peaked cap, fresh complexion, fair mustache,' all the rest of it. So the first thing he did was to shave off his mustache; then he dressed in civvies — luckily he'd brought a suit with him. Then he went down to breakfast . . . and I can tell you it took a bit of courage to do that. Then, as soon as he could manage it, he got out of that hotel. He had a notion that the police would make a round of the hotels. He had a taxi, and drove to the station. Probably the police would be watching the station, too, but he had to chance that.

"The funny thing was, he couldn't remember whether he'd shut the front door of the maisonette or not. It worried him like hell, too. If he had, you see, and the girl lived alone . . . Well, the murder might not be discovered for days. But if he hadn't, and the lights burning inside . . . It worried poor old Smith to death.

"Anyhow, he got to London all right.

"There was nothing about the murder in the papers, and after a time Smith calmed down a bit. Perhaps he had left that door shut after all. He tried not to think of that poor girl lying there, all naked and cold, with the electric light burning overhead, just waiting for someone to come and find her . . . someone else, who wouldn't make such a mucker of it . . . someone else, in fact, who hadn't got other people to protect first.

"He put up at a hotel and spent the afternoon at his club. After tea he went to a theater (remember what queer times the theaters used to keep

during the war?). It was a new play, and whom do you think he ran into in the first intermission? No — not a Brighton policeman: his girl. She'd got twenty-four hours' leave, rung up the Cosmopolitan just after he left, and his club ditto. The porter was able to tell her where he'd gone, so it wasn't a coincidence. (You writer blokes don't like coincidences, I know.)

"Well, of course, she took him off home for food after the show and wanted to know what had happened to his mustache. So it all came out. Well, not all. Smith managed to fake up some kind of a reason for calling on the girl without mentioning the sporting prints. But he told her all about the fat man, and the fact that the shop had closed (of course, you spotted that more or less fixed the time of the murder), and the jam he was in over it all. As a matter of fact, he wanted to tell her. She was a . . . well, frankly, she was twice the man poor old Smith was. Clear-headed, you know, sensible and intelligent and all that, a really capable girl; one of the very best. God knows what she ever saw in poor old Smith."

"You knew her, then?" I could not help putting in maliciously.

"Eh? Oh! Well, yes; as a matter of fact, I did. Slightly, you know. Just slightly."

"Yes, and what did she say?"

"Oh, she took it very sensibly. Didn't ask any awkward questions. Quite saw it wasn't Smith's fault. Didn't blame him a bit for clearing out. Quite saw his point about her father, and herself. In fact, behaved exactly like the grand girl she was."

"Good. So all ended happily?" I said, again conscious of disappointment. Dash it all, a fellow should not tell a murder story at all if it is going to end in a series of anticlimaxes. If a man gets mixed up in a murder, his life ought to be affected by it in some way. A murder, to be artistic, ought to behave like a bomb in the lives of law-abiding citizens, with its wounded as well as its slain.

"Happily? The devil it did!" exclaimed my host with energy. "That's the whole point. You see, the girl took it for granted that Smith had only delayed going to the police until he had talked it over with her. When she told him that it didn't matter a cuss about her father, or herself, she expected him to march straight off to the nearest police station and spill the whole story."

"Oh!"

"Yes. That's rather how Smith felt. Because he just didn't see it that way. He pointed out over and over again the harm it might do her father, he even let drop a hint or two as to the dead girl's profession and the sort of unsavory scandal it would mean. But it was no good. They argued the whole evening but his girl wouldn't budge an inch. It was his duty to go to the police, irrespective of the consequences to anyone, so go he must: and that was all there was to it.

"Well, I'm afraid you can see what's coming. Smith couldn't keep it up

forever. It was clear the girl meant what she said about her family, and gradually she pulled that line out of Smith's grasp. He had been clinging to it, you see. But when they came to the real showdown, they both had to face the truth. It hadn't been the girl's family Smith was really thinking of: it had been himself. And that was the moral problem Smith was driven in the end to face: either to go to the police, confess to what he'd done and what he'd left undone, and take the rap if it was coming to him, or . . ." My host broke off, swallowed a sip or two of sherry, and then added quietly: "Or admit to being a coward." He looked me suddenly in the face. "Which would you have done?"

"God knows! Which did Smith do?"

He twiddled the stem of his wine glass. "Smith *wanted* to do the right thing. I think we can say that for him. But when it came to the point . . . After all, there were so many factors. He was keen on his job in the Army; doing well, too. And there was the girl's father: Smith couldn't brush him aside the way his daughter had. And his own father too. And after all, how could it help if he did go to the police? He couldn't tell them anything they wouldn't know already. No! It's no good making excuses. Smith just hadn't the guts. Not even when the girl made a personal matter of it.

"Finally she cut short his blathering and told him plainly that she couldn't marry a . . . a coward. Either he went to the police then and there, or their engagement was at an end. Smith felt like death, but . . . he couldn't go to the police and chance being arrested for a murder he hadn't done. So the girl pulled off her ring, Smith took it . . ." He sighed. "Smith never saw her again."

There was silence. At last I said, "And that really was the end?"

"Not quite." An ironic little smile played round his mouth. "There's just one more touch — quite a nice one. To get back to his hotel, Smith had to go to an Underground station. The bookstall had closed, of course, but by it there was one of those blackboards they used for bulletins in the war. Smith saw chalked up on it: *Late Special — Girl Murdered at Brighton. Man Confesses.*"

"Perfect!" I exclaimed with enthusiasm. "Of course I can use it. Why, it's a short story as it stands, twist in the tale and all."

"I thought you might be interested," said my host mildly. "Er . . . you will wrap it up a bit, though, won't you? I mean . . ."

"Oh, yes. It's only the essence I want. But what a climax! . . . I suppose Smith did love the girl, by the way? Yes, of course he did, or it would be a rotten story. . . . And then that nasty jab under the ribs from the blackboard, showing that all his agony had been in vain and if the poor boob had only held his tongue like any sensible man . . ."

My host looked bewildered and not a little hurt. "I don't quite understand?"

"Why," I said unmercifully, "it's a good short story, sliced off just there. But Smith wasn't a short story. He was a man. And was Smith's life really shattered?"

"Well, no, if you put it like that. I suppose it wasn't."

"I do put it like that. You see, things work out a bit differently in real life. It doesn't stop, for instance, the way a short story does. Now, is this Smith of yours married?"

"Er . . . yes, he is."

"Any children?"

"Well, a couple . . ."

"Does he love his wife?"

"Of course he does."

"Good! Then shall I tell you what I think? I think Smith had the devil's own luck."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Why, can't you see? But for that little episode Smith might be married now to a cold, unemotional, steel bar of a woman, without a spark of humanity, or the decent feminity to love a man all the *more* for lacking a bit of moral guts once in a while — if indeed anybody but one of those death-or-duty fiends could call it moral guts to go and get oneself arrested for a murder in which one had no concern at all. Take it from me, Smith was well out of that engagement. Don't you agree?" I pressed him relentlessly.

"Well, I . . . Smith . . . I don't think Smith's ever looked at it that way," he stammered.

"Oh, I've no doubt Smith will have thoroughly dramatized the episode," I rubbed it in. After all, I owed him a good turn for the story, though he might not know I was doing him one. "But you tell him from me that it's about time he saw it in its proper perspective. The whole problem was artificial, and to make it a test of true love was the act of an iceberg, not of a grand girl. I'm quite sure that instead of helping Smith to increase his normal stock of courage, which a decent girl does by encouraging his *amour propre*, that smug little wretch did him a great deal of harm. It takes two to make a hero, you know. Instead, it's obvious she gave him a bad inferiority complex, by the angle he stresses of his own story. Now look here, you take Smith aside and tell him from me that he's got just as much guts as the next man. It's all nonsense to go on looking on himself as a spineless —"

A large hand suddenly descended on my shoulder and a large voice boomed in my ear. "Hullo, old boy! Sorry I'm a bit late and all that. Someone been feeding you a spot of sherry? Good!"

"Yes, I don't know if . . ." I looked round for my late host but his place was vacant. Behind me I heard a door quietly closing. I tried to keep the intense curiosity out of my voice. "Yes, some complete stranger's been very kind. Did you happen to see him, George? Who is he?"

"Oh, I know who he is," George said largely. "New member. Name of Farquharson. As a matter of fact, he's rather our star here."

"Star?"

"Yes. Our one and only holder of the Victoria Cross."

THE FRUIT AT THE BOTTOM OF THE BOWL

by RAY BRADBURY

WILLIAM ACTON rose to his feet. The clock on the mantel ticked midnight.

He looked at his fingers and he looked at the large room around him and he looked at the man lying on the floor who was dead and would say no more sayings nor brutalize more brutalities. William Acton, whose fingers had stroked typewriter keys and made love and fried ham and eggs for early breakfasts, had now accomplished a murder with those same ten, whorled fingers.

He had never thought of himself as a sculptor and yet, in this moment, looking down between his hands at the body upon the polished hardwood floor he realized that by some sculptoral clenching and remodeling and twisting of human clay he had taken hold of this man named Arthur Huxley and changed his physiognomy, the very frame of his body.

With a twist of his fingers he had wiped away the exacting glitter of Huxley's gray eyes; replaced it with an airless dullness of eye cold in socket. The lips, always pink and sensuous, were gaped to show the equine teeth, the yellow incisors, the nicotined canines, the gold-inlayed molars. The nose, pink also, was now mottled, pale, discolored, as were the ears. Huxley's hands, upon the floor, were open, pleading for the first time in their lives instead of demanding.

Yes, it was an artistic conception. On the whole, the change had done Huxley a share of good. Death made him a handsomer man to deal with. You could talk to him now and he'd have to listen.

William Acton looked at his own fingers.

It was done. He could not change it back. Had anybody heard? He listened. The normal late sounds of street traffic outside continued. There was no banging of the house door, no shoulders wrecking the portal into kindling, no voices demanding entrance. The murder, the sculptoring of clay from warmth into cold was done, and nobody knew.

Now what? The clock ticked midnight. His every impulse exploded him in a hysteria toward the door. Get out, get away, run, never come back, board a train, get a taxi, get, go, run, walk, saunter, but get the blazes *out* of here!

His hands hovered before his eyes, floating, turning.

He turned them in slow deliberation; they felt airy and featherlight. Why was he staring at them this way, he inquired of himself. Was there

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something in them of immense interest that he should pause now, after a successful throttling, and examine them micrometer by micrometer?

They were ordinary hands. Not thick, not thin, not long, not short, not hairy, not naked, not manicured and yet not dirty, not soft and yet not calloused, not wrinkled and yet not smooth; not murdering hands at all — and yet not innocent. He found them miracles to look upon.

It was not the hands as hands he was interested in, nor the fingers as fingers. In the numb timelessness after an accomplished violence he found interest only in the *tips* of his fingers.

The clock ticked upon the mantel.

He knelt by Huxley's body, took a handkerchief from Huxley's pocket and began methodically to swab Huxley's throat with it. He brushed and massaged the throat and wiped the face and the back of the neck with a fierce energy. Then he stood up.

He looked at the throat. He looked at the polished floor. He bent slowly and gave the floor a few dabs with the handkerchief, then he scowled and swabbed the floor; first, near the head of the corpse, secondly, near the arms. Then he polished the floor all around the body. He polished the floor one yard from the body on all sides. Then he polished the floor *two* yards from the body on all sides. Then he polished the floor *three* yards from the body in all directions. Then he —

He stopped. . . .

There was a moment when he saw the entire house, the halls, the doors, the furniture; and as clearly as if it were being repeated word for word he heard Huxley talking and himself talking just the way they had talked only an hour ago.

Finger on the doorbell. Door opening.

"Oh." Huxley shocked. "It's *you*, Acton."

"I want to see you, Huxley. It's important."

"I don't see — Well, all right. Come in."

He had gone in.

"Go on into the library," said Huxley.

He had *touched* the library door.

"Drink?"

"I need one."

"There's a bottle there of burgundy, Acton. Mind getting it, I'm terribly tired."

Surely. Get it. *Handle* it. *Touch* it. He did.

"Some interesting first editions there, Acton. Look at that binding. *Look* at it."

He had *touched* the books and the library table and *touched* the burgundy bottle and burgundy glasses.

Now, squatting on the floor beside Huxley's cold body with the polishing handkerchief in his fingers, motionless, he stared at the house, the walls, the furniture about him, his eyes widening, his mouth dropping, stunned by what he realized and what he saw. He shut his eyes, dropped his head, crushed the handkerchief between

his hands, wadding it, biting his lips with his teeth, pulling in on himself.

The fingerprints were everywhere!

"Mind getting the burgundy, Acton, eh? The burgundy bottle, eh? With your fingers, eh? I'm terribly tired. You understand?"

A pair of gloves.

Before he did one more thing, before he polished another area, he must have a pair of gloves, else he might unintentionally, after polishing a surface, re-distribute his identity.

He put his hands in his pockets. He walked through the house to the hall umbrella stand, the hatrack. Huxley's overcoat. He pulled out the overcoat pockets.

No gloves.

His hands in his pockets again he walked upstairs, walking with a controlled swiftness, allowing himself nothing frantic, nothing wild. He had made the initial mistake of not wearing gloves (but, after all, he hadn't *planned* a murder, and his subconscious, which *may* have known of the crime before its commitment, had not even hinted he might need gloves before the night was finished), so now he had to pay for his sin of omission. Somewhere in the house there must be at least *one* pair of gloves. He could take his time; there was little chance of anyone visiting Huxley at this hour. He would have until 6 in the morning when Huxley's friends were to pick him up for a scheduled hunting trip.

He went about upstairs opening drawers, using the handkerchief as blotter. He untidied 70 or 80 drawers in six upstairs rooms, left them with tongues, so to speak, hanging out, went on to new ones. He felt naked, unable to do anything until he found gloves. He might go through the house with the handkerchief, buffing every possible surface where fingerprints might lie, accidentally bump a wall here or there thus sealing his own fate with one microscopic, whorling symbol. It would be putting a stamp of approval on the murder, that's what it would be. Like those old waxen seals in the old days when they rattled a papyrus, flourished ink on it, dusted it with sand to dry the ink, and set their signet ring into hot impressionable crimson tallow at the bottom. So it would be if he left one, mind you, *one* fingerprint upon the scene. His approval of the murder did not extend as far as affixing said seal.

More drawers. Be quiet, be curious, be careful, he told himself.

At the bottom of the 85th drawer he found gloves.

"Oh my Lord, My Lord." He slumped against the bureau, sighing. He tried the gloves on, held them up, proudly flexed them, buttoned them. They were soft, gray, thick, impregnable. He could do all sorts of tricks with his hands now and leave no trace. He thumbed his nose in the bedroom mirror, sucking his teeth.

"No!" cried Huxley.

What a wicked plan it had been! Huxley had fallen to the floor,

purposely! Oh what a wickedly clever man was Huxley! Down onto the hardwood floor had dropped Mr. Huxley, with William Acton after him. They had rolled and tussled and clawed at the floor, printing and printing it with their frantic fingertips! Huxley had slipped away a few feet, Acton crawling after to lay hands on his neck and squeeze until the life came out of him like paste from a tube!

Gloved, William Acton returned to the room and knelt down upon the floor and laboriously began the task of swabbing every wildly infested inch of it. Inch by inch, inch by inch, he polished and polished until he could almost see his intent, sweating face in it. Then he came to a table and polished the leg of it, on up its stolid body and along the knobs and on the top, and he came to a bowl of wax fruit and polished the filigree silver and he plucked out the wax fruit and polished them clean, leaving the fruit at the bottom unpolished.

"I'm *sure* I didn't touch *them*," he said.

After rubbing the table he came to a picture frame over it.

"I'm certain I didn't touch that," he said, and stood looking at it.

He looked at all the doors in the room. Which doors had he used tonight? He couldn't remember. Polish all of them, then. He started on the doorknobs, shined them all up and then he curried the doors from head to foot, taking no chances. Then he went to all the furniture in the room and wiped the chair arms and rubbed the material fabric itself.

"That chair you're sitting in, Acton, is an old Louis XIV piece. Feel that material," said Huxley.

"I didn't come here to talk furniture, Huxley! I came about Lily."

"Lily, eh? Oh, come off it, you're not that serious about her. She doesn't love you, you know. She's told me she'll go with me to Mexico City next month."

"You and your money and your damned furniture!"

"It's nice furniture, Acton; be a good guest and feel of it."

Fingerprints can be found on fabric.

"Huxley!" William Acton stared at the body. "Did you *know* I was going to kill you! Did your subconscious know, just as my subconscious knew? And did your subconscious have you make me go about the house handling, touching, *fondling* books, dishes, doors, chairs? Were you *that* clever and *that* mean?

He washed the chairs drily with the clenched kerchief. Then he remembered the body — he hadn't dry-washed *it*. He went to it and turned it now this way, now that, and burnished every surface of it. He even shined the shoes.

While shining the shoes his face took on a little tremor of worry and after a moment he got up and walked over to that table.

He took out and polished the wax fruit at the *bottom* of the bowl.

"Better," he whispered, and went back to the body.

But as he crouched over the body his eyelids twicked and his jaw moved from side to side and he debated, then he got up and turned and walked once more to the table.

He polished the picture frame.

While polishing the picture frame he discovered —

The wall.

"That," he said, "is silly."

"Oh!" Huxley had cried, fending him off. He had given Acton a shove as they struggled. Acton had fallen against one wall, had got up, *touching* the wall, and had run toward Huxley again. He had strangled Huxley. Huxley had died . . .

Acton turned steadfastly from the wall, with equilibrium and decision. The harsh words and the action faded in his mind. He glanced at the four walls.

"Ridiculous," he said.

From the corners of his eyes he saw something on one wall.

"I refuse to pay attention," he said to distract himself. "The next room, now. I'll be methodical. Let's see, altogether we were in the hall, the library, *this* room, and the dining room and the kitchen."

There was a spot on the wall behind him.

Well, *wasn't* there?

He turned, angrily. "All right, all right, just to be *sure*," and he went over and couldn't find any spot. Oh, a *little* one, yes, right — *there*. He dabbed it. It wasn't a fingerprint anyhow. He finished with it and his gloved hand leaned against the wall and he looked at the wall and the way it went over to his right and over to his left and how it went down to his feet and up over his head and he said softly, "No." He looked up and down and over and across and he said, quietly, "That would be too much." How many square feet? "I don't give a damn," he said. But unknown to his eyes his gloved fingers moved in a little rubbing rhythm on the wall.

He peered at his hand and the wallpaper. He looked over his shoulder at the other room. "I must go in there and polish the essentials," he told himself, but his hand remained, as if to hold the wall, or himself, up. His face hardened.

Without a word he began to scrub the wall, up and down, back and forth, up and down, as high as he could stretch and as low as he could bend.

Once he stopped and put his hands on his hips.

"Ridiculous, oh my Lord, Ridiculous."

But you must be certain, his thought said to him.

"Yes, one must be certain," he replied. "One *must* be certain."

And again he rubbed and polished.

He got one wall finished, and then . . .

He came to another wall.

"What time *is* it?" he wondered, drily.

He looked at the mantel clock. An hour gone. It was five after one.

He looked at this new fresh wall.

"Silly," he said. "It's flawless. I won't touch it." He turned away.

From the corners of his eyes he saw the little webs. When his back was turned the little spiders came out of the woodwork and delicately spun their fragile little half-invisible webs. Not upon the wall at his left — that was already washed fresh; but upon the three walls as yet untouched. Each time he stared directly at them the spiders popped back into the woodwork only to spindle out as he retreated. "Those walls are all right," he insisted, in a half-shout. "I won't touch them!"

He went to a writing desk at which Huxley had been seated earlier. He opened a drawer and took out what he was looking for. A little magnifying glass Huxley sometimes used for reading. He took the magnifier and approached the wall uneasily.

Fingerprints.

"But those aren't *mine!*" He laughed, unsteadily. "I *didn't* put them there! I'm *sure* I didn't! A servant, a butler, or a maid, perhaps."

The wall was full of them.

"Look at this one here," he said. "Long and tapered, like a woman's — I'd bet money on it."

"Would you?"

"I would!"

"Are you certain?"

"Yes!"

"Positive?"

"Well — yes."

"Absolutely?"

"Yes, damn it, yes!"

"Wipe it out, anyway."

"There, by gad!"

"Out damned spot, eh, Acton?"

"And this one, over here," scoffed Acton. "That's the print of a fat man."

"Are you sure?"

"Don't start that again!" he snapped, and rubbed it out. He pulled off a glove and held his hand up, trembling, in the glary light.

"Look at it, you idiot! See how the whorls go? See!"

"That proves nothing!"

"Oh, all right!" In rage he began to sweep the wall up and down and back and forth with his gloved hands, sweating, grunting and swearing, bending and rising.

He took off his coat, put it on a chair.

"Two o'clock," he said, finishing the wall and looking at the clock.

He walked over to the bowl and took out the waxed fruit and polished the ones at the bottom and put them back and polished the picture frame.

He looked up at the chandelier.

His fingers twitched at his sides. His mouth slipped open and the tongue moved along his lips and he looked at the chandelier and looked away and looked back at the chandelier and looked at Huxley's body and then at the crystal chandelier with its long pearls of rainbow glass.

He got a chair and brought it over under the chandelier and put one foot up on it and took it down and threw the chair violently into a corner. Then he ran out of the room, leaving one wall as yet unwashed.

In the dining room he came to a table.

"I want to show you my Georgian cutlery, Acton," Huxley had said.

"I haven't time," Acton said.

"Nonsense, look at this silver, this exquisite craftsmanship, look at it."

Acton paused over the table where the boxes of cutlery were laid out, hearing once more Huxley's voice, remembering all the touchings and gesturings.

Now Acton wiped the forks and spoons and took down all the plates and special ceramic dishes from the wall shelf . . .

"Here's a lovely bit of ceramics by Gertrude and Otto Natzler, Acton, are you familiar with their work?"

"It *is* lovely."

"Pick it up. Turn it over. See the fine thinness of the bowl, hand-thrown on a turntable, thin as egg-shell, incredible. And the amazing volcanic glaze? Handle it, go ahead, I don't mind."

Handle it. Go ahead. Pick it up!

Acton sobbed unevenly. He hurled the pottery against the wall. It shattered and spread, flaking wildly, upon the floor.

An instant later he was on his knees. Every piece, every shard of it, must be regained. Fool, fool, fool, he cried to himself, shaking his head and shutting and opening his eyes and bending under the table. Find every piece, you idiot — not one fragment of it must be left behind. Fool, fool. He gathered them. Are they all here? He looked at them on the table before him. He looked under the table again and under the chairs and the service bureaus and found one more piece by match-light and started to polish each little fragment as if it were a precious stone. He laid them all out neatly upon the shining polished table.

"A lovely bit of ceramics, Acton; go ahead — *handle* it."

He took out the linen and wiped it and wiped the chairs and tables and doorknobs and window panes and ledges and drapes and wiped the floor and found the kitchen, panting, breathing violently, and took off his vest and adjusted his gloves and wiped the glittering chromium . . . "I want to show you my house, Acton," said Huxley. "Come along". . . . And he wiped all the utensils and the silver faucets and the mixing bowls, for now he had forgotten what he had touched and what he had not. Huxley and he had lingered here, in the kitchen, Huxley prideful of its array to cover his nervousness at the presence of a potential killer, perhaps wanting to be near the knives if they were needed. They had idled, touched this, that, something else — there was no remembering what or how much or how many — and he finished the kitchen and came through the hall into the room where Huxley lay.

He cried out.

He had forgotten to wash the fourth wall of the room. And while he was gone the little spiders had come out of the fourth unwashed wall

and swarmed over the already clean walls, dirtying them again! On the ceilings, from the chandelier, in the corners, on the floor a million little whorled webs hung billowing at his scream! Tiny, tiny little webs, no bigger than, ironically, your —— finger!

As he watched the webs were woven over the picture frame, the fruit bowl, the body, the floor. Prints wielded the paper knife, pulled out drawers, touched the table-top, touched, touched, touched everything everywhere.

He polished the floor wildly, wildly. He rolled the body over and cried on it while he washed it and got up and walked over and polished the fruit at the bottom of the bowl. Then he put a chair under the chandelier and got up and polished each little hanging fire of it, shaking it like a crystal tambourine until it tilted bell-wise in the air. Then he leaped off the chair and gripped the doorknobs and got up on other chairs and swabbed the walls higher and higher and ran to the kitchen and got a broom and wiped the webs down from the ceilings and polished the bottom fruit of the bowl and washed the body and doorknobs and silverware and found the hall banister and followed the banister upstairs.

Three o'clock! Everywhere, with a fierce, mechanical intensity, clocks ticked! There were twelve rooms downstairs and eight above. He figured the yards and yards of space and time needed. One hundred chairs, six sofas, 27 tables, six radios. And under and on top and behind. He yanked furniture out away from walls and, sobbing, wiped them clean of years-old dust, and staggered and followed the banister up up the stairs, handling, erasing, rubbing, polishing, because if he left one little print it would reproduce and make a million more! and the job would have to be done all over again and now it was 4 o'clock! and his arms ached and his eyes were swollen and staring and he moved sluggishly about, on strange legs, his head down, his arms moving, swabbing and rubbing, bedroom by bedroom, closet by closet. . . .

They found him at 6:30 that morning.

In the attic.

The entire house was polished to a brilliance. Vases shone like glass stars. Chairs were burnished. Bronzes, brasses, and coppers were all aglint. Floors sparkled. Banisters gleamed.

Everything glittered. Everything shone, everything was bright!

They found him in the attic, polishing the old trunks and the old frames and the old chairs and the old carriages and toys and music boxes and vases and cutlery and rocking horses and dusty Civil War coins. He was half through the attic when the police officer walked up behind him with a gun.

On the way out of the house Acton polished the front doorknob with his handkerchief, and slammed it in triumph.

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Howard F. Aldridge's "The Horns Were Wet" is one of the seven "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Seventh Annual Contest. The story is quite clearly the work of a newcomer to the field of detection, especially in its plot construction; yet it has a certain vitality of spirit and attitude, and a freshness both in the background and in the subject matter.

The author is in his late twenties, and he has written for his own amusement since he was a small boy. He attended St. John's University in Brooklyn, but left to go to work for a large New York City bank. The work proved dull, and he soon realized that even if some day he were made president of the bank, he would never really be happy about it. It was then that Mr. Aldridge decided to attempt professional writing. He took short story and radio courses at New York University, followed these with a complete course in TV writing at the Television Workshop. And he has been a free lance ever since, with modest success in the radio and television fields.

Two winters ago, Mr. Aldridge visited Mexico. "I became tremendously interested," he tells us, "in the ancient festival of the bulls and in the brave men who risk their lives each Sunday afternoon." Out of this trip to Mexico came Mr. Aldridge's first short story, and that is how it should be: a new writer should find his material in intimate sources — either in personal experience or in first-hand observation. Howard Aldridge has learned the first great lesson of his honorable profession.

THE HORNS WERE WET

by HOWARD F. ALDRIDGE

THE BLAST OF A TRUMPET SPLIT the air and sent a single note skyward. The note hung for a moment, all shimmering and shining, sending a shiver of excitement down the backs of 50,000 people. The red door swung open and death came out. He came out slowly, his horns glistening in the bright Mexican sunlight. He pawed the ground, snorting and bellowing and waiting.

Suddenly a great roar went up from the crowd. From the far side of the arena a figure advanced. The silver trimmings on his gaily colored chaquetilla threw off little pops of

sunlight that exploded into the eyes of the people who sat in the lower boxes, on the sunny side. The throng that packed Mexico City's Plaza De Toros rose to its feet and roared again; for coming to meet the bull was Manolo Diaz, the Matador of Michoacan, known throughout the republic as El Brazo — The Arm.

High up in a medium-priced seat sat Inspector Luis Rodriguez of the Mexico City Homicide Bureau. The Inspector was not in the Plaza on business. On Sunday afternoon at 4 o'clock all business ceased for Inspector Rodriguez. If a murder were committed in Mexico City between the hours of 4 and 6 on Sunday — well, the corpse would just have to remain where it was until the Corrida was over and Rodriguez could go have a look at it. After all, the corpse would not get up and walk away.

Rodriguez turned to his friend and fellow aficionado, Arturo, as the first "Ole's" rose from the crowd.

"El Brazo starts well," the Inspector smiled.

Arturo grunted. "He starts well, but rather slowly. We will see nothing sensational for a while yet. He is saving himself for the second bull."

In the middle of the bullring, Manolo Diaz led the bull with a series of graceful veronicas which drew applause from the spectators.

The picadors came and went, and the banderilleros planted their sticks. Then the trumpet sounded for the Tercio de Muerte — the Time of Death.

The band struck up *The Diana* and the crowd shouted "Ole" after "Ole" as Manolo Diaz, El Brazo, linked a series of natural passes and worked the horns of the bull close to his chest. At the Hour of Truth, the Matador of Michoacan lived up to his name of El Brazo as he went in for the kill. Swiftly the sword flashed and the huge bull went down. A perfect kill.

Inspector Rodriguez rose from his seat and motioned to Arturo.

"Come on. Let's go down for a beer. We'll come back for Manolo's second bull."

"But the others — " Arturo protested. "There are two bulls to be killed before Manolo fights again."

Rodriguez snorted. "Butchers!" he said. "Gomez and Correro. Who wants to watch them?"

"Correro is no butcher," Arturo said, but he got up and followed the Inspector down the ramp.

"You are right," said Rodriguez as he sipped his beer. "Correro is not a butcher, but after seeing Manolo . . ."

The concessionario leaned across the counter. "El Brazo was good with his first bull?"

"He was saving his capework for number two," said Arturo, "but he was perfection with the sword."

"He sure came up fast," said Rodriguez. "Only twenty-two years old and already the idol of Mexico!"

"I hear he has offers to fight in Spain after this season," said Arturo. "Just think — Madrid, Seville, To-

ledo." He shook his head at the thought of Manolo going to Spain.

The concessionario banged his fist on the counter. "Too few of our matadors go to Spain. Why? Snobs! They think their matadors and their bulls are braver than ours."

Rodriguez laughed. "Calm down, fellow. They are centuries ahead of us in the Fiesta Brava. But when Manolo gets there perhaps he will teach them a thing or two."

The Inspector and Arturo finished a third beer and walked slowly back to their seats. The areneros — the bullring attendants — were throwing fresh sand on the ground and smoothing it over. El Brazo was about to meet his second bull. Over the red door was posted the name and number of each bull. This time it read *No. 24. El Negro Diablo.* The Black Devil.

The peal of the trumpet shimmered again in the thin air and the Gate of the Fright swung wide. El Negro Diablo shot from the gate and charged across the arena with the speed of an express train, slamming his horns into the barrier and throwing up chunks of wood. He was huge and jet black, and his horns were wide and sharp. The crowd gasped at the concentrated fury of the beast.

The banderilleros, waving their capes, tried to run the bull — to see which way he hooked — but they did not succeed. Time and again the bull would charge for the runners instead of the cape, causing them to leap the barrier. El Negro Diablo bellowed his defiance and then stood in the center of the ring, his hoofs tossing up dust as he pawed the ground.

Manolo Diaz advanced slowly, warily, as if he sensed that this bull was somehow different from the ones he had been accustomed to fighting.

The bull saw Manolo; his tail shot straight out and he charged.

Manolo tried to lead him with the cape, but the bull came straight for the matador. Manolo leaped aside.

The crowd was amazed. Never had anyone seen a bull that came charging at a motionless figure, ignoring the moving cape.

The bull, snorting furiously, wheeled and charged again. Once more he ignored the cape and came straight for the matador. This time Manolo could not leap aside. He was caught on the horns and tossed high in the air.

As the wounded matador hit the ground, the bull was on him again, digging at the motionless figure with his wide, sharp horns. The other matadors, along with the banderilleros, ran from behind the barriers, waving their capes and shouting at the bull in a futile attempt to divert him from Manolo. But El Negro Diablo had smelled blood and the fury of his killing instinct was at full tide.

A scream of horror was drawn from the crowd as once more Manolo Diaz was tossed high into the air. One of the banderilleros was pulling and twisting the bull's tail, and finally the bull turned to meet this new

adversary. As the banderillero ran for the barrier with the horns not two inches behind him, the others quickly lifted Manolo and carried him from the arena.

The crowd looked down at El Negro Diablo as he stood alone, bellowing and snorting with the hot sun beating down on him. They saw his wide horns. They were wet, wet and red. Red with the blood of Manolo Diaz.

Rodriguez quietly entered the infirmary that lay beneath the bullring. The white figure of the doctor was bent over the gaily dressed figure of the matador. The doctor stood up straight. "He's gone," he announced.

Rodriguez walked over to the doctor. "He took a terrible goring."

"Yes," said the doctor. "His guts were ripped to shreds." He mopped his forehead. "Dios! Never in my life have I seen a goring like it!"

From the stands they could hear the cries of the crowd. They were no longer shouting "Oles," but were yelling as they had when Manolo was gored.

"What kind of devil-bull have they got up there?" asked the doctor. He waved his hand at the still figure on the table. "Don't tell me I'm going to have another one like him today."

"From the way they're yelling," said Rodriguez thinly, "I wouldn't be surprised."

Arturo came running down the ramp and almost collided with Rodriguez. "I was looking for you," he panted. "What a bull!"

"What happened?" asked Rodriguez.

Arturo took a moment to get control of his emotions. The crowd was still yelling and screaming. "Well," began Arturo, "after they got Manolo out, it was Correro's turn to finish the corrida. He went in almost wetting his pants and the bull came charging straight for him, absolutely ignoring the cape. Correro kept jumping aside and offering him the cape, but the big black devil wouldn't even look at it. Finally, Correro turned and ran. Imagine! Correro, a matador for fifteen years, and this is the first time he has ever run from a bull!"

"I'll bet the crowd liked that!" said Rodriguez sarcastically.

"No, nobody said a word. I mean, ordinarily a matador running from a bull, they'd throw bottles and pillows and there would be a riot — but with this bull nobody blamed him."

"What about Gomez?"

Arturo almost gibbered. "Gomez goes in shaking like a leaf and from even up as high as I was, I could see him turning green. I swear you could actually see his color changing! Well, the judge stands up and gives the condonation. The bull is pardoned, he's not to be killed, and so now he will be taken back to the ranch and used for breeding. Was Gomez glad!"

"Something funny about that bull," Rodriguez muttered.

"Funny! Nothing funny about him — just an unusual bull. Maybe once in a hundred years a bull like that comes along."

Rodriguez shook his head. "No, there never was a bull bred yet that completely ignored the cape. Maybe later in the corrida a smart bull may wise up and hook for the matador, but never right off the bat." He spat on the concrete ramp. "No," he said, "that bull knew all the tricks. Too many tricks."

All Mexico went into mourning over the death of Manolo Diaz. El Brazo was dead — the most promising matador to come along since the great Spanish bullfighter, Manolete. And now he was dead. The flags would fly at half-mast for a month.

Rodriguez sat in the office of Gutierrez, his immediate superior, and idly contemplated one of the half-lowered flags that hung limp on top of the building across the street. "Well, what do you say, Chief?" he asked. "Are you going to let me do a little investigating?"

Gutierrez puffed his cigar furiously. "Listen," he said, "how many times do I have to tell you? There's nothing to investigate."

Rodriguez stood up and began pacing the room. "And I tell you that there's something funny about that bull."

Gutierrez looked up contemptuously. "Something funny! Something funny! I have heard of prizefights being fixed, but I have never heard of a bullfight being fixed. It can't be done."

Rodriguez kept pacing.

Gutierrez spread his hands. "Look," he said patiently, "there are 50,000 witnesses who saw Manolo get gored. There's nothing strange about a goring. Happens pretty often. And to top it all off you were there yourself. Manolo wasn't shot from the stands, nobody tossed a knife into him, he wasn't drugged before the fight, was he?"

Rodriguez shrugged. "I'm not talking about Manolo. He was as good as ever. It's the bull I'm thinking of."

Gutierrez grew more sarcastic. "Oh, I suppose somebody put some hop in the bull's feed to make him faster and wilder. Is that it?"

"No, that's not it," Rodriguez growled. "But that bull had brains. He *knew* — you understand what I mean, he knew that the *man* was his enemy, not the cape."

Gutierrez crushed out his cigar. "Now, who ever heard of a bull that wouldn't chase a cape?"

Rodriguez banged his fist on the desk.

"That's just it! That's what I've been telling you! Ask anyone who saw it. The bull went right for Manolo and hooked him. That's all there was to it."

Now Rodriguez tried a patient tone. "At least let me go out to the Morales Ranch and see Don Morales. He bred this bull. Maybe something in the caste or in the breeding had something to do with it."

Gutierrez sighed. "All right, all right. Go ahead, scout around, ask questions. You got one week to come up with something. After that the whole thing is dropped. O. K.?"

Rodriguez grinned. "Right," he said, and went out the door.

Gutierrez stared into space. "Plenty of men kill each other in Mexico City every day," he sighed to himself, "and that guy has to try to pin a murder on a bull."

Rodriguez and Don Morales walked through the path that led to the open fields where the bulls were roaming and grazing.

"It is on this ranch," Don Morales was saying, "that we breed the fiercest bulls in all Mexico. Indeed, in all the world only the Spanish Miura bulls are fiercer."

"Tell me about El Diablo" Rodriguez asked. "What is the record of his caste?"

Don Morales pursed his lips. "He was dropped from a very good cow, and the bull that sired him was also very brave. But," and here he shrugged, "I would not say that his caste would indicate the magnificent showing he made last Sunday. However, one can never tell about a bull."

Rodriguez persisted. "You're positive that your bulls are never tested or used before a corrida?"

Don Morales stopped short. "Señor Inspector," he said angrily. "I know that as a policeman it is your duty to ask questions. However, your questions now border on the insulting." He gasped for breath. "To think — to even *think* — that I would be guilty of testing a bull before a corrida!"

Don Morales controlled himself with great effort. "Only the cows are tested," he explained, "to determine whether or not they are fit to bear calves. If they are brave and pass the test, they are then bred to the stud bulls who also have been tested beforehand for their courage." He mopped his brow. "But a bull that is to fight, is *never* tested. He never sees a cape. He is merely fed well and allowed to run free until he is chosen for a corrida. He must be between three and five years old, preferably five. Then for three weeks before the corrida he is fed on a special diet of grain-mash so as to build up his weight and strength." He glared at Rodriguez. "I thought you knew all that."

"I did," said Rodriguez. "I just wanted to be sure."

The two men left the path and stood looking out at the herd of black bulls that were grazing in the wide green pasture.

"Is there any reason for you to believe, Don Morales, that El Negro Diablo was any different from the other bulls?"

Don Morales looked surprised. "Different? How do you mean different?"

Rodriguez looked sheepish. "Oh . . . I don't exactly know how to put it . . ." he said. "I mean, did he seem any smarter . . . more intelligent?"

Don Morales smiled. "But of course

not," he said. "All my bulls are intelligent and courageous. Some make a better showing in the arena than others, but that depends on the matador also. No, my friend, El Negro Diablo was just a very fierce bull and Manolo Diaz may have been a little off form last Sunday. That is all there is to it."

"I'd like to take a look at El Negro," said Rodriguez.

"Of course," Don Morales agreed. "Come this way."

El Negro Diablo stood in the enclosed pen and pawed the ground as the two men approached. His hump muscle swelled and he lowered his horns. As the men came closer, the bull banged his horns into the wood and bellowed.

"No doubt about it," said Don Morales, "this one will sire many fierce bulls."

Rodriguez stood admiring the magnificent animal. What a brute! His horns were now white again, with black towards the base of them. Rodriguez thought back to the last time he had looked at the horns of El Negro Diablo. Then the horns were red and wet. He shuddered involuntarily. And once he had thought he would like to be a matador.

Don Morales broke into his reverie. "Well, have you seen enough?"

Rodriguez looked up. "Yes, and thank you for your kindness."

Don Morales bowed. "Not at all. I will have Pedro drive you to the train. You are welcome here."

As Don Morales left to summon Pedro, Rodriguez turned to look once more at the bull. "If you could only talk," he said softly.

Rodriguez turned off the Avenue De San Juan into a side street and entered a small bar. He blinked as his eyes made the change from the bright sunlight outside to the cool darkness within. The bar smelled pleasantly of tequila and wet limes. The bartender smiled a greeting and motioned an invitation to Rodriguez to have one on the house. Rodriguez waved a refusal, and then he spotted his man. He walked over to a small table and sat down, looking at the man seated opposite him.

"Hello, Sanchez." he said.

Sanchez looked up. "Ah, Inspector. How are you? Have a drink."

"No, thanks," Rodriguez said. "Look, Sanchez, I'd like to ask you a few questions."

"Ask away," said Sanchez.

"You helped to unload the bulls at the Plaza last Sunday?"

"But of course," replied Sanchez. "That is my work."

"Did you notice anything peculiar about any of the bulls?"

"Ah!" said Sanchez. "You are referring to the bull that caused the death of El Brazo." He shook his head. "No, there was nothing different about him. A little fiercer perhaps, but that is all."

Sanchez stared at him. "You think there was something funny about El Brazo's death?"

"Did you see it?" Rodriguez asked him.

"Yes, I was watching."

"Well? Didn't you think there was something funny? Did you ever see a bull that acted like that?"

Sanchez thought about it. "No," he admitted. "I never saw a bull with the caste in him that acted like that. But perhaps . . . are you sure he was a caste bull?"

Rodriguez waved his hand. "I'm sure, I'm sure! I went out to Don Morales's ranch, yesterday. The bull was bred there all right."

"You know, Inspector," said Sanchez, "I, too, thought there was something odd about that corrida. But I ask myself, 'How could it be?' You know that each matador doesn't even know which bull he is to fight until the morning of the corrida."

Rodriguez broke in. "Yes, I know that. They draw lots . . . it's all on the up and up . . ."

"Well, then," said Sanchez emphatically, "if the drawing of the lots is on the level, how could anyone be sure that Manolo would draw El Negro Diablo, even if the bull had been tampered with?"

"That's what I keep asking myself," said Rodriguez.

"If I were you," said Sanchez, "I would go down to the red-light district and look up a girl named Maria Carlos."

"Why?" asked Rodriguez.

"Because Manolo used to go and see her quite often, before he became a top matador."

Rodriguez walked slowly along the dimly lit, squalid, red-light section. Maria Carlos. He remembered no one by that name, so she probably had no police record. He turned the corner and a girl came out of the shadows and murmured something to him. Rodriguez stopped, and the girl came up and took his arm. Rodrigeuz shook off the arm and held out five pesos. "I am looking for information," he said softly. "Do you know where I can find a girl named Maria Carlos?"

He waved the five pesos under the girl's nose.

The girl snatched the money and pointed. "She usually waits around the corner."

Rodriguez started off, and the girl melted back into the shadows.

As he turned the corner he saw three women, waiting. He sauntered by and one of the girls detached herself from the other two and sidled up to him.

"I'm looking for a girl named Maria Carlos," he said.

The girl stared right at him. "I am Maria Carlos."

He looked her over. Not more than twenty. Still very pretty.

"It is important that I speak with you."

Maria smiled. "Come on," she said, taking his arm and leading him a few steps to a decaying building. They went to a room on the top floor, where Maria closed the door and locked it.

Rodriguez went over and sat on the bed. "I want to ask some questions."

Maria looked at him warily. "Police?"

"Yes."

Maria looked frightened. "I have done nothing," she protested. "I have stayed within the limits of the district!"

Rodriguez waved his hand. "I'm here to ask you about Manolo Diaz."

She calmed down and sat opposite Rodriguez. "Manolo?" she said softly. "Poor Manolo."

"How well did you know him?" asked the Inspector.

The girl had a faraway look in her eyes. "He came here a long time ago," she said. "He used to just sit and talk to me about the bulls. He used to tell me how some day he would be the greatest matador in Mexico."

Rodriguez looked surprised. "He just used to talk?"

Maria smiled. "Mostly he would just talk. He was lonely."

"When did you last see him?"

"Some months ago," Maria answered. "After he became famous he sent me money. . . . Once in a while he would come around to see me. He was grateful to me for being nice to him when he was a nobody."

"Did he ever tell you if he had any enemies?"

"Enemies?" Maria said. "No, he said nothing about enemies."

"Do you know if he had any enemies?" asked Rodriguez.

"We all have enemies," the girl answered. "I have them, you have them." She shrugged. "But Manolo talked mostly of his friends."

"Who were —?"

"Only two," said the girl. "A boyhood friend named Guardo — I forget his first name. And a girl from his home in Michoacan."

"What is her name?"

"Carlotta Vazco," Maria said. "I could never forget that name, he talked about her so often."

Rodriguez stood up. "And that is all you can tell me?"

"That is all," the girl answered. "What more is there?"

Rodriguez threw five pesos on the bed. At the door he turned. "You don't seem to be broken up over his death."

Maria's face looked old. "What good would tears do him now?" she said.

Gutierrez looked up from his desk as Rodriguez came into the office.

"There are a bunch of bullfighters outside," he said.

"I know it," answered Rodriguez. "I sent for them. They're members of Manolo's cuadrilla."

He walked through Gutierrez's office and into his own. He opened the outer door and motioned the cuadrilla in. "Sit down. Make yourselves comfortable," he said. "This won't take long. Just a few questions."

Huerta, the stocky picador, spoke up. "Does this concern the death of Manolo?"

"It does," replied Rodriguez.

"I thought so," nodded Huerta.

Rodriguez turned his attention to

the picador. "You have been around bulls and bullrings longer than anyone here," he said. "Tell me, what do you think about the bull that got Manolo?"

Huerta spoke slowly. "What you say is true, Señor Inspector, I have been a picador for twenty-five years. I have been with Manolo ever since he started. He was a great matador. That is why I joined his cuadrilla. I only pic for great matadors."

"I understand," nodded Rodriguez. "But about that bull . . ."

"If I did not know," said Huerta, "that the bull was bred at the ranch of Don Morales, who is a man of the highest integrity, I would say that the bull had fought before."

"Explain," said Rodriguez.

"A bull," said Huerta, "is good for only one fight. No one knows how he will react when he enters the arena, but one thing is certain. The bull will always charge the cape *always!*" He paused. "Unless . . . unless he has fought before and remembers. If he remembers, then he will ignore the cape and charge the matador."

"Have you ever heard of any such cases?" asked the Inspector.

"Never in Mexico. Perhaps in Venezuela, sometimes they use a young bull in the amateurs, where the bull is not to be killed. Then a couple of years later they might use the same bull in a real corrida. But never in Mexico or Spain. And certainly, never a bull from Don Morales's ranch. He would never permit it."

"But could not a bull be spoiled before he even enters an arena? If he were worked with a cape on the ranch, say?"

Huerta smiled. "Of course. But who would want to do such a foolish thing?"

Rodriguez ignored the last question. "Have you all been with Manolo since he started?"

Huerta pointed to a young man. "He is new," he said. "But all the rest of us were always members of the cuadrilla."

"Whose place did he take?" asked Rodriguez, motioning toward the new man.

"He took the place of an old friend of Manolo's," Huerta said. "An old friend by the name of Ernesto Guardo."

Guardo! The one Maria had mentioned! "Tell me about this Guardo," Rodriguez said.

"A nice boy," said Huerta. "He also wanted to be a matador, but unfortunately . . ." Huerta put his hand on his chest. "He had much desire but no heart, no courage."

"Manolo took him on?"

"As I say, they were boyhood friends. Both vowed to become great matadors. Manolo became the great El Brazo, while Guardo fought scrub bulls in the provinces. Manolo took Guardo on as a banderillero."

"How was he at that?"

Huerta shook his massive head. "Same trouble. No courage. He missed planting the darts. The ones that stuck were planted poorly. The people used to laugh."

"Then Manolo fired him?" said Rodriguez.

"No, Manolo was loyal to his old friend. He would not let him go. But Guardo, himself, solved the whole thing. He quit."

"Where is he now?" asked Rodriguez.

Huerta shrugged. "Who knows? Maybe he went back to fighting bulls in the small Plazas."

Rodriguez stood up. "All right, thank you for coming. That's all."

When the cuadrilla had gone, Rodriguez went in to see Gutierrez. "I'm going down to Michoacan," he said, "to see the girl Manolo was going to marry."

"Go ahead," said Gutierrez, and he swore under his breath.

Carlotta Vazco had Aztec Indian features, which she got from her mother. "Very attractive," thought Rodriguez to himself, as he sat looking at her across the small room.

"It is difficult for me to speak of Manolo," the girl was saying, "but I will answer anything I can."

"Were you in love with him?" Rodriguez questioned gently.

"Yes."

"Was he in love with you?"

"That is difficult to say," Carlotta replied. "Before he became famous, he was in love with me. After . . . well, a bullfighter has many women. I have heard that there are many very beautiful women in Mexico City."

"I will tell you something, Señorita," said Rodriguez. "I have been speaking with people in Mexico City that knew Manolo. They say he talked only of you."

Carlotta smiled sadly. "I am glad of that," she sighed. "I suppose now that Manolo is dead, Ernesto will be coming to see me again. He was in love with me, also."

Rodriguez spoke softly. "Ernesto?"

Carlotta nodded. "Yes, Ernesto Guardo. He, too, is a bullfighter. He was Manolo's best friend."

"Do you know where Ernesto Guardo is now?" Rodriguez said.

"Yes. He is working on the ranch of Don Morales."

So that was it! Rodriguez got up quickly. He bowed. "Thank you very much, Señorita," he said, and he left so swiftly that Carlotta looked after him in surprise.

The waning sun cast long shadows through the trees as Rodriguez walked down the path that led to Don Morales's ranch. He approached a man who was busy shoveling grain into a pen that enclosed six bulls. Rodriguez spoke. "I am looking for Ernesto Guardo," he said. "Could you tell me where I can find him?"

The man scratched his head. "Let me see . . . oh, yes, Guardo is testing some cows. He should be finished soon."

"Where?" asked Rodriguez.

The man pointed his arm. "Over there. Down the path and turn left. But Guardo will be finished soon. If you wait by the path he will undoubtedly be along in a few minutes."

Rodriguez thanked him and walking down the path, he turned into a little dirt road. He recognized it as the same road he and Don Morales had walked along the first day he had come out to the ranch. Suddenly there loomed before him the large enclosure where El Negro Diablo was housed. Rodriguez looked in at the bull. The beast was calm, standing there snorting softly. Rodriguez heard footsteps and looking up, saw a young man come sauntering down the path. He limped ever so slightly.

As the man passed him, Rodriguez spoke. "Are you Ernesto Guardo?"

The man turned, a surprised look on his face. "Yes," he said. "What is it you want?"

Rodriguez took a step forward. He held out his wallet. "I am Rodriguez of the Mexico City Homicide Bureau. I want to ask you some questions."

Guardo smiled. "Questions? About what?"

"About the death of Manolo Diaz," Rodriguez replied.

"Ahh! Poor Manolo," said Guardo. "I saw the whole thing. I was at the corrida. It was a high wind that caused his death."

"I was there too," said Rodriguez. "There wasn't even a breeze blowing."

Guardo shrugged.

"I know all about it," Rodriguez went on. "The bull was spoiled. Spoiled by you."

Guardo grinned. "You can prove what you say?"

"I don't have to prove it," Rodriguez said, "I know it!"

Guardo shook his head. "I mean you can prove this accusation in a court of law?"

"It might be hard to prove," Rodriguez admitted.

"It would be impossible to prove!" Guardo spit out.

Guardo sat down on a rock. He sneered. Then he slapped his knee softly. "You are a clever man," he said to Rodriguez. "For your cleverness, I will reward you. Sure, I spoiled that bull," he pointed to El Negro Diablo standing in the enclosure. "I worked him with the cape for three months. Then one day he charged me instead of the cape." Guardo touched his leg. "He hooked me in the leg. That is why I have been limping. When he did that, I knew he was ready."

Rodriguez stared at Guardo. "How did you arrange for Manolo to fight this bull?"

Guardo laughed. "I didn't arrange it. You see, the bulls bred on this ranch are the best in Mexico. Consequently, they are sent to the best bullrings. That means mostly they are sent to Plaza Mexico in Mexico City."

Rodriguez broke in. "And Manolo was also the best. That also means Mexico City."

Guardo smiled his agreement. "I knew that eventually Manolo would meet one of the bulls that I worked with the cape."

Rodriguez drew in his breath. "So

you have spoiled other bulls here?"

"No," replied Guardo. "But I would have, if Manolo had not met my friend in the pen over there."

"Because of Carlotta?" asked Rodriguez.

"Because of Carlotta, a little bit, but mostly because when Manolo and I were boys together we both made a solemn vow to become matadors. We swore that neither one of us would rise without the other. We would both become great or neither of us would become great." He spat on the dusty ground. "But Manolo forgot that promise when he became El Brazo."

"You know," said Rodriguez "you're a ——," and Rodriguez said an unforgivable word.

Guardo took no notice. "Manolo went on to become the best matador in Mexico, while I, with all my talent, was shunted to the background. I could not make a great name for myself — not so long as I was forever in the shadow of Manolo."

"You could never make a great name for yourself. You have no guts, my friend," said Rodriguez.

"Who says this?" asked Guardo, leaping to his feet.

"Huerta says it, and he should know."

"Huerta!" Guardo spat his contempt.

"How did you fix the drawing of the lots?"

"Again, I did not have to arrange it," said Guardo. "What difference if another matador drew El Negro? He would have been gored and then Manolo would have to go in anyhow." He smiled. "And one thing about Manolo, he would never run from a bull."

"So you would continue to spoil bulls and let other matadors be gored — until eventually you got Manolo?" Rodriguez said bitterly.

"That is true," said Guardo.

"Bullfighter!" Rodriguez rasped. "You're no bullfighter. You're a dirty murdering butcher!"

Guardo swaggered a bit. "I am enough of a bullfighter to have worked El Negro Diablo with the cape and spoiled him."

Rodriguez nodded sarcastically. "Sure, with a barrier close behind you."

Guardo shrugged. "Well, it is all over now and you can never prove anything I've said to you. Even if I didn't deny it." He grew excited. "Even if I were to present you with a signed confession, no court would ever believe it. They could never convict me on such a charge."

"The perfect crime, eh?" said Rodriguez.

"You must admit I have been clever," said Guardo. "Although I never figured on a police inspector who had so much knowledge of bulls." He shrugged. "But why all the fuss? I made everyone happy. Manolo is happy. His troubles are over and he died as a matador should — in the bullring." He pointed to the pen. "El Negro Diablo is happy. He was not killed and will now spend his life

making love to cows. You are happy since you figured out the whole thing. And I am happy that Manolo is dead. Even the fans are happy, since they saw something they will never see again — a bull that charged the matador." He shrugged again. "So why all the fuss?" He gathered up his cape and turned to go. "Well, Inspector," he said gaily, "Adios."

He had gone about five steps when Rodriguez called out: "Stop!"

Guardo turned and looked at the revolver Rodriguez held, pointed directly at him. "But what is this?" he said.

"You thought you would never have a trial" said Rodriguez. "But you will have one. Right now!"

"What do you mean?" asked Guardo.

"Take your cape and go into that pen," said Rodriguez, pointing to the enclosure where El Negro Diablo stood, staring out at them.

Guardo turned pale. "You are crazy," he said to Rodriguez.

Rodriguez took out a watch with his left hand. "If you can last for five minutes, then you're free," he said. "That's a better chance than you gave Manolo."

"But the bull has been spoiled!" shouted Guardo. "There is no chance to work him with a cape!"

"But you spoiled him," replied Rodriguez. "Go on, get in the pen!"

"No!" screamed Guardo.

"Yes," said Rodriguez, or I'll put a bullet square into your yellow guts!"

"You wouldn't dare."

Rodriguez cocked the hammer and his finger tightened on the trigger.

"All right," said Guardo. "I'll go in."

He moved slowly toward the enclosure, and El Negro Diablo saw him come. The huge bull lowered his head and began to paw the ground.

"Señor Inspector, I beg you . . ."

"Get in, you ——," and Rodriguez repeated the unforgivable word.

"Why . . . why are you doing this?" quavered Guardo.

"I am a friend of our ancient Fiesta Brava," said Rodriguez. "I am a friend of the whole bloody, brutal, beautiful spectacle! Now, get in there or I'll blow your spine apart."

Guardo opened the door and went in. He unfurled the cape and stood with his back against the wall. El Negro Diablo lowered his horns and charged. Guardo leaped aside, tossing the cape across the muzzle of the bull. The bull wheeled, snorting his anger, and came again. He ignored the swirling cape and banged Guardo with a smash against the wall. As Guardo tried to jump aside, the sharp horns pinned him to the wall. Snorting and bellowing, the bull drove his horns into the writhing body of Ernesto Guardo . . .

Rodriguez walked slowly up to the house of Don Morales. He felt a little sick. However, it was true justice. True Mexican justice. He knocked on the door. "Don Morales," he called out, "there has been an unfortunate accident."

Once more the horns were wet . . .

THE JUDGE CORROBORATES

by J. S. FLETCHER

EVER SINCE DICKINSON HAD ARrested Gamble on a charge of burglary, he, Dickinson, had carried about with him an uneasy conviction that there was something wrong. The arrest had been made very quietly, and without any fuss, as Gamble emerged from the bar of the *Pride of London*, in Maida Vale, one evening, alone. All that the passers-by had noticed — if they noticed anything at all — was that two well-dressed men went up to and exchanged a few words with a third well-dressed man, who presently turned and walked off with them, as if they were all friends. But Dickinson remembered what Gamble had said.

"You're making a bloomer, my boy!" said Gamble. "And no error! But you'll find that out soon enough. In the meantime ——"

In the meantime, of course, there was nothing for it but to accompany the two detectives to the nearest police station, and to be charged. The charge was that on the night of November 21 last, he, John Gamble, did feloniously break and enter the house of Martin Philip Tyrrell, in Avenue Road, St. John's Wood, and did steal from that dwelling certain specified property. And once more Gamble had shaken his head — and laughed.

"Not me, sonny," he answered. "You're on the wrong 'bus this time!"

The detective who had accompanied Dickinson felt curious, and looked at Gamble, who had a reputation, with something more than interest.

"What's your game?" he asked in a friendly manner. "Alibi?"

"Something of that sort, old sport!" replied Gamble. "You won't get no conviction against yours truly this journey." Then he turned and glanced at Dickinson, with a sneer. "Think yourself blooming clever?" he remarked. "Well, you ain't!"

Whatever other people might think, Dickinson knew himself to be clever — he knew, too, that he had exercised a vast amount of pains and ability in his conduct of this particular case. It had been put in his hands from the first, and he had followed it up with the patience and intelligence which had earned him high rank in the Criminal Investigation Department. On the face of it, this was a very ordinary case. Mr. Tyrrell's house, a detached one standing in its own garden, had been burglariously entered on a certain dark night, and silver and jewelry stolen. The burglar had done his work quietly and well, and had got clean away without rousing any of the household. But he had left a trace — two traces of his personality. On Mr. Tyrrell's sideboard

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stood a decanter of whiskey, and glasses, and a jug of water — the burglar had not been able to withstand the temptation to take a drink. He had helped himself — and on the sides of the glass from which he had drunk, and on the jug from which he had poured out water, he had left distinct impressions of thumbs and fingers. And Dickinson, who had an extensive and peculiar acquaintance with the higher-class cracksmen of the metropolis, and who spent hours in going through fingerprint records, no sooner saw those marks than he said to himself — Jack Gamble!

Jack Gamble also had a reputation. He was a smart chap, who picked up a good living by his wits. When he was not burgling, or thieving, he was engaged in other shady transactions, chiefly connected with horses — sometimes he kept inside the law, and now and then he strayed over the edge. One way or another, he had often been in trouble, and at the time of his arrest outside the *Pride of London* he had not long been restored to liberty after a term of imprisonment. Dickinson had been keeping a patient eye upon him, and when he saw these fingerprints he felt no doubt whatever that Gamble was going to fall into his hands again. He went off and compared the prints carefully with those in the official keeping, and that done he did a little quiet and secret work in finding out what Gamble's movements had been on the night of the burglary. When he discovered that Gamble had been out most of that night, leaving his lodgings at 10 o'clock, and not returning until 6 next morning, he proceeded to act — for Dickinson was one of the most convinced of believers in the fingerprint theory and system, and he was able, by enthusiasm, to infect others with his faith.

Nevertheless, now that he had got him safely under lock and key, Dickinson was upset by Gamble's cheerfulness. He kept seeing Gamble. He saw him when Gamble was before the magistrate who, though apparently not quite such a firm believer in the fingerprint theory as he might have been, was sufficiently convinced by the evidence to send Gamble for trial. And Gamble, awaiting removal to a detention prison until the next sitting at the Central Criminal Court, nodded affably to Dickinson, who had gone down to the cells at the police court to take another look at him.

"Think you're steaming ahead all right, old cock, don't yer?" remarked Gamble. "So don't I! You're going to get thrown clean off the line, presently, see? And, I say, when will the little affair come off? What, next week? You don't happen to know who the old bloke on the bench'll be, do yer, Mr. Dickinson?"

Dickinson believed in being on friendly terms with the criminals who came under his notice; he adopted a sort of indulgent schoolmaster attitude to them.

"Your case'll most likely come before Mr. Justice Stapleton," he an-

swered good-humoredly, "and you'll have to make that alibi you've been hinting at a pretty good one to convince him, my lad! What're you laughing at?"

For Gamble had begun to chuckle, as if some highly humorous notion had suddenly occurred to him. Before he could explain, certain peremptory officials motioned him and certain other committed and remanded gentlemen to step towards the open door of Black Maria, drawn up in the yard outside. Gamble went off, still chuckling.

"See you later then, Mr. Dickinson," he said as he went. "Meet you at the C.C.C. next week. And you won't have half a surprise, either!"

That made Dickinson all the more uneasy — and suspicious. Gamble had adopted a queer, half-contemptuous, defiant attitude before the magistrate. He had not even taken the trouble to employ a certain smart man of law who had defended him more than once, and had once actually restored him to such friends and relations as he happened to possess. He had listened to the fingerprint evidence and the proof of his being absent from his lodgings with sneering eyes and lips. Asked what he had got to say, he replied that he'd say what he had to say at the proper time and place — "and not half, neither, as they'd find out." Altogether, he had shown such certainty that Dickinson was beginning to feel afraid, and perhaps a little doubtful. But he fell back on the hard theory — *no two fingerprints are alike* — and he was dead certain that the marks left on Mr. Tyrrell's glass and jug were those of Jack Gamble's fingers.

It was nothing but expert and circumstantial evidence against Gamble when his case came on at the Central Criminal Court before Mr. Justice Stapleton and a common jury. Indeed, what was really being tried, in the opinion of at least one spectator, was not Gamble, but the fingerprint theory.

The fingerprints in question were passing for an hour or two between the bench and the jury-box, the jury-box and the barristers' table; for another hour or two, experts were giving opinions, pointing out technicalities, expatiating learnedly on the theories and practice of such authorities as Bertillon, Herschel, Galton, and Henry. And Gamble sat in the dock — having been courteously accommodated with a seat in view of the probable length of the case — and listened with a half-scornful, half-bored expression.

Once more he had pleaded his innocence; once more declined to be represented by anybody but himself. But he had asked, with some eagerness, if he could give evidence on his own behalf, and call a witness, and on hearing that he could — a fact of which he was already well aware — had smiled and winked derisively at Detective-Sergeant Dickinson.

It all came to an end at last — the case for the prosecution. Every one of the experts had sworn that the

marks of thumbs and fingers on Mr. Tyrrell's property were, in their belief, as experts, correspondent to those stamped by the prisoner in more than one official record. Evidence had been brought forward to show that Gamble was away from his lodgings during the hours at some period of which the burglary had undoubtedly been committed.

It was, perhaps, not the strongest possible case; the stolen property had not been traced, nor had a single article of it been found in the prisoner's possession; nor was there any evidence to show that he had disposed of valuable goods about that time. But — though nothing of the sort was mentioned in court, in accordance with the strict principles of British justice, which takes every case on its own merits — it was generally known, even by the judge and jurymen, who are supposed to know nothing, that Gamble was an expert in these sort of things as the fingerprint experts were clever in theirs, and most persons present expected to hear him found guilty, and sent to penal servitude again.

Except Dickinson. Dickinson, after giving his own evidence, had taken a seat in a corner, where he watched the man in the dock suspiciously.

Dickinson did not like the look of Gamble; Gamble was altogether too indifferent, too bored, too superior to his situation. He made Dickinson think of a card player who holds all the aces — and has another card ready up his sleeve.

And when Gamble was called upon for his defense, and made his way from dock to witness-box, smiling, Dickinson felt a bit sick; he wanted to convict Gamble, and he began to have an idea that Gamble was going to put a stop to that game. Yet — how?

Gamble took the oath as piously as if he had done little else but practice religious observance all his life. Possibly he felt unusually serious at that moment. At any rate, it was with an air of great decorum that he turned to the judge, who was watching him curiously.

"As I ain't represented by counsel, my lord," said Gamble, "perhaps your lordship'll let me tell my tale in my own way? Sworn evidence, my lord."

"Certainly, tell your own story after your own fashion," answered his lordship. "You are probably quite well aware that you can be examined by the prosecution on whatever you say?"

"Quite aware o' that, my lord," replied Gamble, cheerfully; and smiled on the barristers in front of him. "Any of these here gentlemen is quite welcome — or your lordship, either — to ask me any questions as seem to occur to 'em — or to you, either, my lord." He paused, and transferred his smile to the twelve open-mouthed men in the jury-box. "Well, my lord, and gentlemen of the jury, what I have to say to this here charge is — an alibi! I'm going to prove an alibi, and when I've finished proving it, I

expect to be discharged, and no other. Fingerprints or no fingerprints, I wasn't within six miles of St. John's Wood at any time of the night on which this here burglary was carried out. Why? 'Cause I was somewhere else."

Gamble, from long experience of criminal courts, either as principal actor or interested spectator, was well aware of the importance in oratory of a dramatic pause, and he made one now, leaning over the edge of the witness-box, and glancing around him with a calm and triumphant smile. And suddenly he drew himself up, and began to check off his points on the tips of his stubby fingers.

"To start with, gentlemen," he continued, "the charge against me is that I broke into this house in Avenue Road, St. John's Wood, on the night of November 21 last, according to the evidence, between 10 o'clock — that 'ud be the evening of November 20 — and 6 next morning. Gentlemen, from 10 o'clock in the evening of November 20 until 5:30 next morning, *I was in Wimbledon.*"

Gamble spoke the last word in a thrilling whisper, and the judge started and glanced sharply at him.

"You were — where did you say?" he asked, bending towards the prisoner.

"Wimbledon, my lord!" answered Gamble, loudly and promptly. "Wimbledon. Where your lordship resides."

The judge started again and frowned deeply. It was quite true that he did live at Wimbledon, in a pretty old house on the common, and his frown meant that he was not quite sure that he was pleased to hear that Mr. John Gamble had been in that select neighborhood.

"Continue your evidence," he said, a little sharply. "You were saying ——"

"That I was at Wimbledon that night, my lord," replied Gamble, with a smile which sought out Dickinson in his corner. "At Wimbledon — part of the time, anyway — and t'other part of the time on Wimbledon Common. And, gentlemen," he went on, with a dramatic turn in the direction of the jury-box, "why was I at Wimbledon? Gentlemen, I'm here to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so — out with it. I went to Wimbledon for an unlawful purpose — which never came off."

Gamble let this soak into the atmosphere with another dramatic pause. Then he set out again, with an outstretched finger pointed at the foreman of the jury, a fat man whose eyes goggled.

"Mind you," he said. "I'm a-going to tell the truth against myself — to clear myself of this 'ere particular charge. Now, it's quite true — I ain't going to deny it, for it 'ud be of no use to — I've been in trouble before on little matters of this sort. I got over the results of one of 'em — the last — on'y last October. And says I to myself, 'I'll chuck that game — 'tain't no good, when all's taken into

account.' But about November 17 or 18 — I can't be sure to a day — a friend of mine who knew my abilities in this 'ere line, meets me one day in Long Acre, where I was looking after a bit of horse-flesh, and says he to me, confidential, 'Jack, my boy,' he says, 'if so be as you wants a nice soft job in your line what you could work on your own without a partner,' he says, 'blimey if I can't put you up to the very thing!' he says. 'What is it?' says I. 'I ain't particular for any job; but, of course, if it's something very soft ——' 'You could do it standing on yer blooming head,' he says. 'It's this 'ere. You know I live down at Wimbledon?' 'Certainly I do,' says I. 'Well,' says he, 'there's an old bloke has a very nice house on Wimbledon Common what you may be acquainted with — professional,' he says. 'Which I mean Mr. Justice Stapleton.' "

Mr. Justice Stapleton, who had been obviously fidgeting for some minutes, turned a very red face on Gamble.

"I hope you're not trifling with the Court, prisoner?" he remarked acidly. "In the circumstances you must have every indulgence, but ——"

"It's all gospel truth, my lord," answered Gamble reassuringly. "Your lordship'll see it in a minute — can't give my evidence no other way, my lord. Well," he continued triumphantly, and the judge leaned back with an air of patient resignation — "well, gentlemen, that's what this here friend of mine — which I shan't give his name and address, nor call him — unless strictly necessary — said. 'Mr. Justice Stapleton,' he says. 'The old bird,' he says, 'is one o' them folks as doesn't draw their front blinds down o' nights, and many's the time,' he says, 'as I've passed the window of his dining-room, and looked in when all the lights was a-blazing, and his lordship getting his grub. And,' says he, 'he's a sideboard that's just creaking under gold and silver cups and plates, and that sort o' thing. I understand,' he says, 'as how his lordship was a bit of an athlete when he was a young 'un, and won a lot o' pots, and then he's won more in steeplechasing. Anyway,' he says, 'there's enough stuff on that sideboard, to make it worth your while to pay the old chap a quiet visit, see?'

"Well gentlemen, of course nature is nature, and when I hears this, I thinks to myself — well, it 'ud be no harm to go down to Wimbledon Common and reconnoiter, as they term it. And so, about 9 o'clock in the evening of November 20 last — you'll be particular about that date, gentlemen! — I went down to Wimbledon, and I met this 'ere friend o' mine, and we took a quiet walk along by the house he spoke of — your lordship's."

Gamble turned suddenly on the judge, and the eyes of every man in Court turned there, too. It was very evident that Mr. Justice Stapleton was not so much annoyed as puzzled. He was looking at the prisoner with a queer, inquisitive, searching ex-

pression, and for an instant seemed about to speak; instead, he signed him to proceed. And Gamble smiled and proceeded.

"Well, gentlemen, it was just as this 'ere friend o' mine — a truthful gentleman, he is! — had said," he continued. "His lordship's house stands back a bit — not much — from the road at the side of the common. His dining-room windows front the road. And, as my friend had said, the blinds wasn't drawn — and we could see right in. Now I'll invite his lordship's particular attention to what me and my friend saw. There was a full blaze of electric light in the room; there was also an uncommonly fine fire in a big hearth. The sideboard at the back — black oak — was crammed with gold and silver plate — salvers, cups, vases, such like; it fairly shone and sparkled in the light. And in that room there were three people — a-sitting in easy chairs in front o' the fire. Perhaps his lordship'll now take notice of how I describe 'em. One of 'em was his lordship himself, in his evening finery — no need to describe him. Another was a lady — his lordship's lady, I took her to be — she was knitting — made me think of my old mother, gentlemen, she looked that peaceful. And the third ——"

Mr. Justice Stapleton leaned slightly towards the witness-box, and appeared to listen eagerly for the next words. Gamble gave him a sharp glance out of his eye-corners as he proceeded.

"The third," he said, "was a tall, very fine-looking old gentleman, foreigner by the look of him, with a pointed white beard and waxed mustache, and sat between the other two, smoking a big cigar. He was in evening clothes, too, and he'd a red riband round his neck, with a sort of star or medal hanging from it. A very peaceful, nice group they was — with their cigars and their glasses."

Mr. Justice Stapleton, with an odd look at the members of the Bar, suddenly sat upright again, and plunging his hand through his robes into some inner pocket, pulled out what was evidently a memorandum book, which he laid on the desk before him. And Gamble paused — but a nod of the judicial wig motioned him to go on.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, eyeing the fat foreman with approval, "me and my friend we saw all this, and then we went on, quietly, and we had a drink or two, and then we went home to his house and took a bit o' supper. And when that was over: 'What d'yer think o' this job, Jack?' says he. 'Softish 'un, ain't it?' he says. 'Leastways to a gentleman o' your ability,' says he. 'Might be,' says I; 'but I'd like to take a look round the premises when things is quiet,' I says, 'just to see how things is, yer know,' I says. 'Well, there ain't neither dog nor cat in that house,' says he. 'His lordship can't abide 'em.' 'Cats,' says I, 'don't count — I've done many a bit o' business with a couple o' cats lookin' on, interested like. But dogs is different. You're sure there ain't

no dogs?' 'Not a dog,' says he. 'I knows! Horses is his lordship's 'obby — dogs he will not have!' 'All right,' says I. 'Then we'll just sit here a bit — say till it's past midnight, and then — well, I'll just prospect a bit. Not,' I says, 'as I shall operate tonight, but I'll just take a little look at doors and windows.' So, of course, we had a drop of something comforting on that, and we talked about one thing and another, and at half-past 12 I went back, through them bushes which is so convenient, to take a look round his lordship's house in the dark."

Mr. Justice Stapleton had opened his little book by that time, consulted some entry in it, and shut it up again. He was now leaning his chin on his hand, watching Gamble with a mingling of keenness and amusement, and he so continued to watch him while the accused went cheerfully on his way. And Gamble resumed his candid narrative with something that was very like a wink at the jury.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, leaning still farther over the edge of the witness-box, as if to take the whole Court into his confidence more fully, "you see that I'm being open and truthful with you, from the mere fact that I'm giving myself away! For, of course, the instant I entered his lordship's garden, I was where I oughtn't to ha' been — with intent to commit a felony. Only, I didn't intend to commit it just then — maybe not for a night or two — I only just wanted to look round. And I did look round — careful. I took a look at doors and windows — back, front, and side. I satisfied myself there wasn't no blooming dog. And, eventual, I took a carefuller look at the window of the dining-room, where all that plate was spread out on the sideboard. And while I was engaged at that, and quiet as a mouse, there was a light suddenly shone in on that room, and in walks his lordship there, a-carrying a bedroom candle. And to prove to you — and to him — that I saw him, he was wearing pink and white-striped pajamas, and he'd a white woolen shawl tied round his throat. I ask you, gentlemen, and I asks his lordship — how could I ha' seen them little details if I hadn't been there?"

Here followed another dramatic pause, during which Gamble took a calmly disdainful look at Dickinson. Amid a dead silence, he went on: "And more than that, gentlemen! A second later, in comes the other old gentleman," he said. "Him with the pointed white beard and waxed mustache. He was in a dressing-gown — a bright red 'un, with a black cord round the middle. And he'd a candle, too, and I saw at once that both of 'em had been roused by something that I couldn't account for — for I'd certainly made no noise as I knew of, and was only looking through the window. They both talked a bit — then his lordship went out into the hall, and a second later looked in again with a big overcoat on, and a bull's-eye lantern in his hand; and

at that, gentlemen, I made myself scarce, and hopped it out of the garden and in among the trees at the other side of the road. I hadn't been there two minutes when a policeman comes along, and I heard his lordship call him from the front door — whereupon I went off across the common, and back to my friend's house. And there I stopped until the workmen's trains started running — and then I took one home to London. And there you are! And now I asks all present — how could I ha' been in Avenue Road any time that night, when I was down at Wimbledon? And I asks his lordship there, as a gentleman, to corroborate what I've said — for he can!"

The attention of the Court shifted itself from the prisoner to the judge. Every eye was turned on Mr. Justice Stapleton as he drew himself up.

"This is certainly a very remarkable statement on the part of the prisoner," he began. "He puts me in a very curious situation. I am really being asked to be witness as well as judge. If this case had been tried by one of my brother judges, the prisoner would, I suppose, have raised the same defense, and called me as a witness on his behalf. Really, I am somewhat at a loss — but I may as well tell you that I believe what the prisoner has just told us to be perfectly true. It is quite true that I have a prejudice — a life-long one — against drawing blinds and curtains over my windows. It is also true that I have a quantity of gold and silver plate on my sideboard, and that it can be seen, I daresay, from the road outside at night, when there is a strong light in that room. I don't attach much importance — in the present matter — to these details; the prisoner might easily have gained so much knowledge at any time. But" — here his lordship picked up his little book — "it is impossible to deny that certain events took place at my house on the night of November 20–21.

"On that night I had an old friend of mine, Monsieur Paul Lavonier, a famous French scientist, to dine and sleep there. In appearance he is precisely as the prisoner describes him — he was certainly wearing the collar and star of a much-prized decoration. It is quite true that at, or about, 1 o'clock in the morning I fancied I heard a sound in my garden, and that I went down to the dining-room, that M. Lavonier came down, also, in such a garment as the prisoner spoke of. It is also true that I put on an overcoat, lighted a lantern which I keep in my hall, opened the front door, and hailed a passing constable, who afterwards looked round the grounds, and found nothing suspicious. And, frankly," continued the judge, glancing with a shrewd and humorous smile, "I do not see how this man who undoubtedly witnessed these things at my house on Wimbledon Common could have committed a burglary in the north of London at the same time. It might be suggested that he left Wimbledon at once on being baffled at my house, at or about 1 o'clock, and pro-

ceeded straight to Avenue Road. But you will remember, gentlemen of the jury, that, according to Mr. Tyrrell's evidence, Mr. Tyrrell himself was up until 2 o'clock that morning, that he only went to bed for two hours, as he had to catch a train at King's Cross, and that burglary at his house certainly took place between 2 and 4. Now there are no trains from Wimbledon to town at that time of night and it is extremely improbable that the prisoner could get from one point — my house, where he certainly was about a quarter or half-past 1 — to another, many miles away, before 4. I am, of course, informally corroborating the prisoner's evidence — I really don't see that I can avoid doing so in this peculiar and extraordinary situation. The case against the prisoner rests entirely on these fingerprints — I shall make some remarks on that matter presently." He glanced at the prosecuting counsel. "Do you wish to ask this man anything?"

"If your lordship pleases," answered the barrister addressed, who was plainly taken aback.

He turned to Gamble.

"Why didn't you tell all this before the magistrate?" he demanded.

"Because I preferred to tell it here," retorted Gamble.

"Did you know that his lordship was going to try this case?"

"Not till Dickinson told me — after I'd been committed," said Gamble, pointing at the detective.

"Were you intending to call his lordship as a witness then?" asked the counsel.

"What do you think?" sneered Gamble. "'Course I was!"

"Why haven't you called that friend of yours at Wimbledon?"

"What?" exclaimed Gamble. "To give him away for putting me on to the job? Not likely."

"You need not have let us know that. You could have called him to prove that you spent most of that night with him at Wimbledon, without saying why. What proof have you, besides what you've said, that you ever were at Wimbledon?"

Gamble smiled, and suddenly thrust his fingers into his waistcoat pocket. There was evidently a hole in its lining, and, after some fumbling and fishing, he extracted something which he held up.

"That!" he said. "Ticket from Wimbledon to Waterloo. They didn't take it. Look at the date!"

There was some consultation between the Bench and the Bar, and then his lordship, taking off his spectacles, turned leisurely to the jury and began to talk about the fingerprint system. And Dickinson frowned and nudged a fellow detective, who sat by him. For he knew that Mr. Justice Stapleton was a good deal of a skeptic about that system, and he expected what precisely came to pass within the next twenty minutes. For the jury returned a verdict of "Not Guilty," and Gamble walked out of the dock a free man once more.

And, once free, Gamble sought out

Dickinson in the precincts of the Court, and openly sneered at him.

"What did I tell yer, Mr. Clever?" he said, making a face at the detective. "Didn't I say you were making a bloomer this time? Yah!"

But Dickinson only made a face, and took himself off for a drink.

Dickinson was as certain that Gamble had bamboozled the Court as he was certain that Gamble was the culprit in the Avenue Road affair. But as to how Gamble had managed it, he was utterly at a loss to conceive. He kept an eye on him for some time, and whenever they met, Gamble winked at him derisively. The derision signified not so much a reference to what had just occurred as to the fact that Gamble was going on the straight, and giving Dickinson no chance to get at him. Dickinson, narrowly as he watched and listened, could hear nothing, until, suddenly, he missed his man. Gamble was no longer seen in his usual haunts — he made a complete disappearance. And it was not until he had been gone for some time, and Dickinson had failed to gain news of him, that he heard something from one of those strange individuals who hover between criminals and criminal-catchers, and who, being neither, have none of the honor which exists even among thieves.

"You ain't seen nothing of Jack Gamble of late, I reckon?" he observed. "And you won't — no more. Made a clean wipe of the slate, Jack has; gone to Australia with a mate."

"That's it, is it?" asked Dickinson.

"That's it, sir," asserted the other, and laughed as at some pleasant thought. "He done you a fair treat over that Avenue Road affair, didn't he, now? Of course, there was them as knew how it was done, me amongst 'em. And now that old Jack's t'other side of the world, I don't mind telling you, between you and me, private. It was like this here. When Jack came home after that last stretch, him and another mate of his looked round for some likely cribs to crack. One of 'em was that house in Avenue Road, and another was the judge's place near Wimbledon Common. They settled to do 'em the same night. Jack did the Avenue Road business, right enough; t'other man went to Wimbledon, and his job didn't come off. It was him — t'other man — as had all the adventures that Jack told in Court! He primed Jack with all the points next day, down to every detail, giving him that ticket, and it was agreed between 'em that if either of 'em got took in connection with the Avenue Road affair, he'd make use of the Wimbledon knowledge to get up an alibi. It happened to be Jack, and he just reeled off all that had happened to the other chap as if it had been to himself, see? Nice, simple thing — what, Mr. Dickinson?"

Mr. Dickinson replied briefly that he had always known Jack Gamble to be a clever man, and retired — to visit Mr. Justice Stapleton, and add to that learned gentleman's stock of knowledge.

SKY WRITING

by CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

IT WAS A LONG TIME SINCE I HAD seen Dove Dulcet, the literary agent. Some of you may remember that in the old newspaper days he and I always made a point of meeting for lunch and a ramble shortly before Christmas. It became for us a holiday ritual, and usually in the gay confusion of the streets some idea occurred to Dove that I was able to turn into a story.

But during the depression years I had lost touch with him. We had both had our troubles; I was much away from New York, and except for rare telephone calls we had not communicated. I heard, indirectly, that he had given up his literary agency. The writers he represented were no longer selling well. They had emigrated to Majorca, where they were said to be living on almost nothing, or they had gone to Hollywood and were living on celluloid. Even his lecture bureau, the most profitable phase of the agency business, had collapsed. Authors were now going round to department stores, talking and autographing books gratis, and glad to do it in exchange for a few sandwiches and an occasional shot of rye from the merchandising manager.

Except, of course, the British and European visitors, who are superior to fluctuations in exchange, the literary profession seemed to be returning to the conditions of the Eighteenth Century, when writers lived on patronage or doles from the printer. As a matter of fact, that didn't worry me much: I remembered that some of our greatest books were written under that system. But it must have been hard on Dove, who lived by commissions on royalties.

I was really shocked, though, when I saw him by chance in a drug store. He had changed greatly. The sweep of thick blond hair that had covered his fine cupola was growing thin; there were shadows under his eyes and he seemed nervous. Finding him in a drug store, I naturally supposed he was buying books, either Plato's *Dialogues* or *The Memoirs of a Chambermaid*, which drug outlets were featuring at 89 cents. To my surprise he was at the prescription counter, which one can usually find hidden away behind pyramids of toys, perfumes, electric irons, and dog harness. He was just receiving a small phial from the clerk; there seemed to be some formality about it, for the pharmacist was taking his name and address.

I was careful not to hail him just then, for something furtive in his bearing gave me a queer suspicion that perhaps he indulged in narcotics of some sort, and I didn't want to

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embarrass him. So I was relieved to see him go to the luncheonette counter and order a three-decker toasted tuna fish and a frosted malted chocolate. A man who can do that still has ligature with reality. I took the adjoining seat and said hullo.

He greeted me with all the old-time affection, yet there was some subtle change in his quality. "Hullo, Ben, you old news hawk," he said; and I knew at once that he must have taken to reading the brisk hebdomadal that always uses that phrase. In the old days he never read anything less urbane than *The Manchester Guardian Weekly*. What had once been a rich romantic imagination now seemed overlaid with a rather feverish excitability.

"What have you been doing all this long while?" I asked. "Writing your autobiography?" For I knew that is often the litterateur's resource in hard times, and when a writer's old friends don't hear from him they suspect uncomfortably that he may be using them for copy.

"I've been too busy living it," he said. "And what about you? I often think of the days when we used to do a story together every Christmas. Are you still the amateur detective?"

"The only thing I'd like to detect is a little improvement in business."

"I got out of the manuscript racket," he said. "I'm in something real. Advertising. That's the kind of writing that has some kick to it; making an impact on half a million people at once. Boy, you pick your words carefully when you're buying a piece of space that costs maybe a thousand bucks."

"Such as where and for whom?" I asked, delighted to see him still the sanguine old visionary. "Who are your clients?"

"Did you ever hear of *Ginger Cubes?*"

I had, vaguely, but I don't care for too much ginger, either as flavor or temperament. "It's a kind of chewing candy, isn't it?"

"Digestive dice," he replied mysteriously. "Don't lose their taste like ordinary gum. Tonic and nourishing. Heavens, haven't you seen my full-page ads with the caption, '*Alimentary, my dear Watson, Alimentary*'?"

Just to please him I tried to buy a package at the chewing gum counter, but they didn't have any. Apparently the impact he spoke of hadn't included drug outlets. But Dove was not dismayed. "It's because we won't cut prices," he explained.

I had supposed that with large affairs on his hands he might be in a hurry, but he seemed to have plenty of leisure. "Let's stroll up the Avenue," he suggested; "it'll be like old times." It was one of those mild pellucid afternoons we often have early in December, almost springlike; delightful for the idler but disastrous to merchants who need frost and wind to drive customers inside. I remarked on this.

"There's one kind of advertising for

which this weather's ideal," Dove said. "Sky writing. Look at that blue, and no breeze to spoil the celestial script. Think of being up there in a plane, writing the name of your product in white smoke letters a mile high. That's Kipling's 'brushes of comet's hair,' if you like. That's the kind of buying space that appeals to me."

He went on talking (rather wildly, I thought) about advertisers who keep too close to the ground and see only the nearest thing. Retail trade, he maintained, was too timid and conservative. Outside one of the big department stores he insisted that he recognized an important merchant in the disguise of a Salvation Army Santa Claus, rattling a tambourine.

"I warned them," he said. "They've got to be more imaginative."

"The thought that has always struck me about that sky writing," I said, "is how amusing it would be if the aviator had a sudden brainstorm; instead of lettering out the message he was hired to do, suppose he wrote the name of a rival product, or, if he was a cynic, he might scrawl some horrid jest across pure heaven. How comic it would be to watch people's faces on the street."

Dove looked at me oddly. "It's queer you should say that," he said.

We had reached St. Patrick's Cathedral, and my friend showed an impulse to lounge, gazing upward with the speculative eyes of an Einstein sighing for new categories to conquer. Though I was overdue at my office I kept him company for a while.

"I wanted to have a good look at the sky," he said. "As a matter of fact, today I had the greatest disappointment of a lifetime. I had been arranging to do some smoke writing for *Ginger Cubes* one of these fine afternoons before Christmas, when everybody's out on the streets. I thought it was all fixed, but somehow our chief competitors got wind of it and have signed up the aviator to do it for *them* instead. The contract was practically settled, but I suppose they offered a fancy price."

"That's tough luck," I said. "Who's your rival?"

"That stuff they call *Chump* — because you chew it in lumps. Blocks of sweet elastic stuff, something like caramel. They're putting on a big campaign and selling a lot of it."

"You take it very philosophically."

"Do I? I'm grinding my teeth inside. I think I've figured out a way of queering their show. But I don't like to get the aviator in wrong — he's a good sort. We've got quite pally."

"He's a mighty clever pilot," I said. "Well, old man, I must go back to work."

"It was a nice coincidence, seeing you again. Tell you what — the smoke writer's going to have breakfast with me the day he makes his trip. I can't tell when it'll be, because it depends on the weather, but I'll phone you. I'd like to have you meet him and we

can watch him work. There might be a story in it."

As Christmas neared I watched the weather, a succession of wet or blustery days quite impossible for celestial script, as Dove calls it. Now that my attention had been called to it, I saw *Chump*, the new candy, advertised everywhere; little booths or shops called *Chumperies* were springing up in real estate vacancies, which were plentiful. But of Dove's *Ginger Cubes* I saw little sign. I wondered what scheme he had evolved in his fertile brain for checkmating the enemy. Then on Christmas Eve itself, very early in the morning, my phone rang.

"Hurry over," he said. "It's a great day for *Chump*."

Dove was living in a queer little penthouse in the West Fifties. His sitting-room walls were covered with posters and advertisement proofs testifying the virtues of *Ginger Cubes*. The aviator, a nice young fellow, seemed a little embarrassed at having to disappoint Mr. Dulcet. "It's not my fault," he explained. "I'd sooner do it for *Ginger Cubes* because you talked about it first, but the other folks nipped in with their contract. They offered a big price, but they only want me to hang it up twice for them."

"It must be a difficult job," I suggested. "When you do some of those letters you have to fly upside down, don't you?"

"Just as easy as right side up," he said. "I been flying since I was a kid; ran away from school to hang around planes. Well, I must grab my coffee. I got to get out to the airport. Have to tune up the ship and see those smoke tanks are O. K."

Dove, who prides himself in his kitchen craft, served the coffee and ham omelet himself. The aviator left early. "I'll be over the Avenue about lunch time," he said. "Dassn't leave it any later than that; it looks like a little breeze coming and the smoke will drift too quick."

I promised to meet Dove opposite St. Patrick's exactly at midday to watch the performance.

Conditions were perfect; a cold, still air in which the smoke would hold together, and the great highway was thick with pedestrians. Dove was in fine spirits while we waited. Accompanying him was a stout, hard-looking gentleman whom he introduced as Mr. Ribstone, president of the Ginger Cubes Company. "I can't make out," said the latter, "why Mr. Dulcet wants me to watch *Chumps* doing their stuff. It's bad enough to hear about it."

"Wait and see," said Dove placidly. "If this works the way I expect, you'll double my appropriation. — Look!"

Infinitely far overhead in the placid noon appeared a rapidly streaming curl of white vapor. It was fascinating to watch the tiny plane, no bigger than a speck, swing round that huge curve, jetting a volute of thick, snowy smoke. It spiraled an enormous *C*, and then shot upward. But it was different from previous sky writ-

ing I had seen; instead of making each letter separate the pilot kept his gas vent open and wrote the word in continuous script. He rose and rose on the long upward slope of the *h*, then looped sharply and came plunging down. I heard Dove gasp.

"It's all right," I said as I saw the plane manage the sharp turn at the bottom of the *h*. "He's safe. He's doing it perfectly."

I watched the long succession of loops and banks and turns which finally spelled out the whole word. All Fifth Avenue gazed in admiration as the big, sprawling letters were traced against infinity. When the last twirl of the *p* was finished and the smoke shut off I remembered that Dove had promised us a surprise. I turned to speak, but his face was grim.

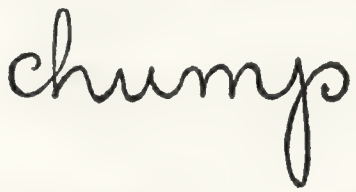
"Well, that's one thing I never thought of," he said. "Curse these modern schools and their Spencerian handwriting. I never supposed he'd do it in script."

EDITORS' NOTE: *Dove Dulcet's scheme to checkmate his competitor seemed foolproof. Yet something has obviously gone wrong. Mr. Morley has given you the all-revealing clue. Can you figure out the "slip 'twixt the cup and the lip"?*

"What do you mean?" we asked.

"I doped his coffee at breakfast. I gave him some of that drug — what do they call it? — inversinol — that makes you do everything upside down. I thought if he did it that way it would drift off before anyone could read it. Well, he *did* do it upside down, but if you write it in that schoolboy hand it's just the same either way."

Still I didn't understand, until he seized a piece of paper and wrote:



"Turn it the other way round," he said.

"Once a chump, always a chump," said Mr. Ribstone. "You're fired!"

But Dove is resourceful. The day after Christmas he was at work as a salesman in a new *Chumpery* on the corner of Broadway and Seventy-eighth Street.

James Yaffe is a positive-minded person. He knows what he likes and he has no hesitation in saying so. His ideas, for example, on the technique and purposes of the detective story have been carefully thought out, and he is ready, willing, and able both to expound and defend them. To Jimmy the most important part of any detective story is the detective himself — all other aspects are secondary. He admits that there is a legitimate place for violent "realism" of style and plot, that Freudian psychology can inspire motivation and action, and that authentic police procedure is not to be sneezed at. Nevertheless, all this means comparatively little to him. He enjoys most the type of detective story which features a colorful, lively, and entertaining detective character.

The crime itself, the background of the story, the clues, and all the other characters are merely springboards to Jimmy. They are important only in the sense that they make it possible for the detective-protagonist to toss off amazing deductions, to fling witty insults, to befuddle the police, and generally to dominate a situation which, without the electrifying presence of the detective himself, would probably be downright tedious.

Well, so Jimmy says, and he tries to practice what he preaches. In his new series about Mom, the Bronx housewife, Jimmy has created a detective character along what he considers the classic lines. Mom emerges as a vigorous person who is not only smarter than most of us but takes great and open delight in showing it. And she has a flavor all her own, a flavor that stems from Jimmy's observation of real life. This flavor is compounded of Mom's special kind of joke and insult, her individual attitude toward life, and her own characteristic method of solving crimes.

Well, it is not important whether you agree with Jimmy's philosophy or not. What is important is James Yaffe's conception of a Bronx mama — her bite, her freshness, her undeniable smack of reality . . .

MOM MAKES A BET

by JAMES YAFFE

EVEN THOUGH I'VE BEEN WORKING for the New York Homicide Squad almost five years, I still give a little shudder at the thought that some day somebody might discover my secret — specifically, that most of my successful cases were really solved by my mother. As a matter of fact,

this is one of Mom's greatest weapons against me. Whenever she wants me to give up an afternoon to fix her icebox, or to find an eligible young policeman for one of her unmarried nieces, or to take her part in an argument with my wife Shirley, Mom always remarks, in an innocent, casual tone of voice, "Wouldn't they give a big horse laugh, Davie, those other young fellows on the Homicide Squad, if somebody told them how you figured out what happened to that old lady that was dropped down the laundry chute in that midtown hotel?"

A hundred times in the last five years I have resolved that I would never tell Mom about any of my cases again. And a hundred times — under the influence of Mom's delicious roast chicken, and her sharp commanding look that turns me into a little boy again — I have broken my own resolution. "And incidentally," Mom herself would probably add, if she read that last sentence, "you're not exactly dying with unhappiness, are you, when Inspector Slattery gives you a slap on the back, and tells you what a budding young Sherlock you are?"

That's the wonderful thing about Mom. She understands human psychology — a little too well for comfort.

Anyway, last Friday night Shirley and I had dinner in the Bronx as usual, and as soon as we had settled down to our chopped liver Mom asked me her usual question: "So, Davie, how is the work going these days?"

"Nothing very exciting, Mom. I'm on a case now which is strictly open-and-shut. We know who the murderer is, and we're bound to get a conviction."

"Why, then, do you have such a gloomy look on your face? Like your Uncle Nathan you look, when he found out that his *schnorrer* brother-in-law Seymour was coming to visit him."

"Well, frankly, Mom, there *is* something about this case. I can't exactly put my finger on it. It's just that — well, usually when you arrest a murderer, you feel very pleased with yourself. You say to yourself, 'There's one more rat out of circulation.' But, somehow, *this* murderer that we arrested yesterday — well, he's such a nice old gentleman —"

"Sentimentality, pure sentimentality," Shirley said, giving me one of her pitying sighs. Shirley majored in sociology at Vassar, so naturally she's a very superior girl, and I ought to feel honored by her pity. "How many times have I told you, David, if Inspector Slattery is satisfied with a case, then you mustn't stick your nose in out of sheer mentality. That's not the way a person gets ahead in this world —"

"I agree," Mom said, with a sweet smile at Shirley. "People *shouldn't* stick their noses in. It's a subject I've been meaning to bring up —"

"Let me tell you about this case, Mom," I said quickly, because Mom's chopped liver should be enjoyed in an atmosphere of peace and harmony. Sure enough, Mom's curiosity about

the case was the one thing that could sidetrack her from defending me against my wife — and so, I went right into the story.

"There's a delicatessen downtown," I said, "called Krumholz' Sixth Avenue Grotto — a very well-known little place, it gets a big crowd of celebrities, theatrical people, athletes, and so on. At night the place is usually crowded, but business is lighter during the lunch hour.

"So yesterday, at lunch, this theatrical producer, DeWitt Grady, went to Krumholz' Grotto with his father-in-law, old Dr. Bartlett, the famous surgeon, now retired. Grady was one of the Grotto's regular customers. He came in there three or four times every week, and was known and disliked by all the employees. From all reports, he was a terribly overbearing, bad-mannered, nasty person, this Grady, always making complaints and throwing his weight around."

"It's one of the primary traits of theatrical people," Shirley said. "Sociological studies prove that the average theatrical person —"

"Tell me, darling," Mom said to Shirley, "did anybody ever make a sophie-logical study of sophie-logical people?"

"I don't follow you, Mother," Shirley said, "What exactly are you driving at?"

"Grady was *especially* obnoxious," I cut in, "to one of the waiters in the Grotto, a little old man named Irving. Now, Irving has been working for Krumholz for 30 years, and everybody knows him and likes him, because he's so sweet and good-natured, always asking the customers about their illnesses and their babies, and remembering their birthdays and anniversaries, and so on. Maybe that was why Grady took such particular pleasure in picking on Irving. Anyway, whenever he came to the Grotto, Grady made Irving's life miserable. He ordered him around in a high-handed tone. He made insulting remarks and sarcastic jokes. He sneered at the old man and humiliated him, and sometimes didn't even leave him a tip.

"Yesterday afternoon, during lunch, was no exception. Grady and his father-in-law, Dr. Bartlett, sat down at one of Irving's tables, and right away Grady started in. He called Irving over with some remark about 'if your legs can carry you this far, old man.' He ordered the first course — Blue Point oysters — and told Irving not to be stingy with the horse-radish. Krumholz' Grotto is famous for its horse-radish, you know — 'the strongest horse-radish in town,' that's one of its slogans — and Grady liked to accuse Irving of cheating the customers out of their horse-radish.

"Then, when Irving brought the oysters, Grady ordered a couple of bowls of noodle soup, for Dr. Bartlett and himself. And he told Irving to be sure that his own noodle soup had no salt. 'I was just to the doctor last week,' Grady said, 'and he told me if I eat any more salt I'll get a terrible heartburn.' Half a dozen times Grady repeated these instructions to Irving,

and Irving assured him that there wouldn't be any salt in his noodle soup, and Grady said, 'I can't trust you. You'll forget to tell the cook. You're losing your memory, old man.' So Grady called over Krumholz himself, and told him to check up on Irving and make sure that one of the noodle soups didn't have any salt in it — and you can imagine how humiliating this must have been for poor old Irving. Well, at last Irving went out to the kitchen for the noodle soup — with Grady yelling after him, 'And for Pete's sake, be careful, don't stick your thumb in it!' "

"This Grady," Mom said, "he reminds me of a cousin of your late father."

At this Shirley gave a superior little laugh. "Really, Mother, it's amusing how everybody in the world reminds you of somebody you know."

"This is because I know a lot of people," Mom answered, without batting an eyelash. "My knowledge of people don't come strictly out of books. It's the difference between somebody that actually plays in the gin rummy game, and somebody that only sits around and *kibitzes.*"

"As I was saying," I broke in, "Irving went out to the kitchen, told Looie the cook to give him two noodle soups, and warned him several times that one of the soups shouldn't have any salt in it. So Looie poured out one bowl from the big vat where the noodle soup, all salted and ready to serve, was kept. The other bowl he mixed up and cooked specially himself, leaving out the salt. Then the two bowls of soup were placed on Irving's tray, and Irving started out of the kitchen. At the swinging door which led from the kitchen to the main dining-room, Krumholz himself was standing. Grady being such a steady customer, Krumholz wasn't going to take any chances with Grady's order. So Krumholz stopped Irving, dipped a spoon into Grady's soup, and swallowed a whole spoonful of it himself, just to make sure that there wasn't any salt in it. Don't forget that, Mom, because it's very important. Krumholz actually *tasted* Grady's soup. He found that it tasted fine, and there *wasn't* any salt in it, so he told Irving to go ahead and serve it.

"That's what Irving did. He carried his tray directly across the dining-room to the table where Grady and Dr. Bartlett were sitting. Even though Irving had several other people's orders on that same tray — a couple of bottles of beer, a big tall Krumholz Special Peach Sundae topped with whipped cream, and a piece of nesselrode pie — he went straight to Grady before anyone else. That's how scared poor Irving was of that Grady. He gave Grady and Dr. Bartlett their soup, Grady took a spoonful of it, smacked his lips, and said, 'It's not bad.' But that's as far as he got. Because he suddenly gave a groan and slumped to the floor, and by the time anybody could reach him he was dead. The Medical Examiner found a dose of potassium cyanide in him —

and enough of it left over in the noodle soup to kill twenty more theatrical producers.

"And there you are, Mom. There was a bottle of potassium cyanide in the kitchen — Looie the cook kept it there to kill rats. He kept it locked up in a cupboard, but any one of Krumholz' employees had access to the key. So in the ordinary course of things we'd be faced with such a wide choice of suspects that we might never solve the case. Except for one little stroke of luck. Krumholz himself tasted Grady's noodle soup just before it was served. He drank a whole spoonful of it, and nothing happened to him. Therefore, the poison must have been put in the soup *after* it left the kitchen and *before* it got to Grady. And there was only one person who had the opportunity to put it there during that period of time — Irving the waiter. Poor old Irving." And as I came to the end of my story, I couldn't help giving a little sigh.

"Only you don't feel so happy about it, Davie," Mom said, in a voice which was almost gentle.

"It's the motive that bothers me, Mom," I said. "Is it possible that a man would really commit murder because someone accused him of putting his thumb in the soup? Honestly, that's carrying professional pride a little too far. Besides, this Irving — he just isn't the vindictive type. I've never seen such a nice, mild-mannered old man. You know, we had a terrible time taking his fingerprints down at the station — because after he dipped his fingers in the ink, he was afraid he'd get the desk sergeant's shirt cuffs dirty." I broke off with a shake of my head, a little angry at myself, and also noticing the look that Shirley was giving me. "I don't know what I'm getting all worked up about! The man committed murder, and he's going to pay the penalty, and that's all there is to it!"

After looking at me a moment with an expression that was half-affectionate and half-laughing in my face, Mom gave a sigh of her own. "Davie, Davie, so full of a kind heart and feeling sorry for people! Don't you know yet? Feeling sorry is no good to anybody, feeling sorry don't keep that old man out of the electric chair, feeling sorry don't find out who put the Potash and Cyanide in the soup —"

"Potassium, Mother dear," Shirley said. It was one of the delights of Shirley's life, the occasional little liberties that Mom took with the English language. Personally I never noticed them any more myself. After 33 years with Mom, my mind automatically makes the translation from "Potash" to "potassium." But not Shirley. She never lets a single slip go by. What else is a Vassar education for? "Po-tass-i-um," she repeated. "You spell that p-o-t-a —"

"Thank you, thank you, Shirley darling," Mom said, with a terribly polite wave of a chicken bone. "A regular little spelling bee you're turning into." Then Mom looked right back at me. "Like I was saying, before

interruptions, better than a kind heart any day is brains. How about your brains, Davie? Along with the gun and the badge, don't the Homicide Squad issue you some brains maybe?"

"I'm afraid brains won't be much help to old Irving, Mom. It's an open-and-shut case."

"So let's open and shut it a little more. For instance, I notice that there's some important pieces information you forgot to mention to me. Probably it's just an absent mind, no doubt you *meant* to mention them already —"

"What pieces of information, Mom? I've told you everything that's important."

"About the motive you told me? Excuse me, I didn't hear it. Maybe I'm getting a little deaf in my old age —"

"I told you that I wasn't satisfied with Irving's motive, Mom —"

"Irving's motive? Who's talking from Irving's motive? What about everybody else's motive? What about the father-in-law, Dr. Bartlett — did he collect any money from this Grady's murder? What about Looie the cook — did he hate this Grady because Grady insulted his cooking? What about all that?"

Well, it always gives me a great deal of pleasure to triumph over Mom. The fact is, I get so few opportunities — so I try to make the most out of any one that comes along. "Well, well, Mom, I guess we stupid policemen are just a little bit ahead of you on this point," I said, puffing out my chest and putting on my most professional smirk. "Dr. Bartlett couldn't have killed Grady for his money, because Grady didn't have any money. He was almost broke. His last three shows were big flops, and he was living entirely on bluff. Besides which, Dr. Bartlett is a very rich man himself, with a Park Avenue penthouse. And Looie couldn't have killed Grady for insulting his cooking, because Grady *liked* Looie's cooking. In fact, the only person in the restaurant that Grady *never* insulted was Looie. He gave Looie big tips every month, and he used Looie as a caterer for all his parties. So I'm afraid your deductions were just a little inaccurate that time, Mom."

Strangely enough, Mom didn't look the least bit taken aback. She simply nodded her head and said, "Good. Exactly what I was thinking. Another point, Davie, and this is a big point, so think hard, please. What was it, please, that this Grady ordered to eat after his noodle soup?"

"What's that, Mom?"

"*After* his noodle soup, what did he order? You don't understand plain simple-minded English?"

"Mom, will you please tell me what difference it makes what he ordered *after* his noodle soup? He didn't eat it, Mom. It was the noodle soup that poisoned him, not —"

Mom gave a secret little smile. "I'm interested, this is what difference it makes. So humor a poor old woman that's getting soft in her head and answer the question, please."

"All right, Mom, all right," I said. And to myself I thought: Women are all the same; even in the middle of a murder case they can't get their minds off irrelevant little details like food and housekeeping — "I don't remember exactly, but I did glance at the order check that Irving filled out, and I think Grady ordered a Krumholz Special Three-Decker Pinochle Sandwich. That's bacon, lettuce, mayonnaise, smoked herring, Russian dressing, and salami, with a pickle on the side."

"Thank you," Mom said. "This is a *very* important piece information." Shirley gave a sigh, and another one of her pitying looks, but Mom just smiled and went on, "The last, and final, important point. This Irving the waiter, he's such an old man. So how did he keep up with his work? In the rush hours, for instance, didn't he have trouble with the orders? Wasn't it hard for him to hold the trays? Explain, please."

"This is supposed to be an important point, Mom?"

"Maybe not to policemen and Sophie-ologists," Mom said, with a smile, "but to ordinary common-sense people, absolutely it's important."

"If you say so, Mom. Well, it happens you're right, Irving *was* having trouble with his work. That's one of the most pitiful things about this whole case. The poor old man was getting much too old to be a waiter. He couldn't carry a heavy tray over his head with one hand any more, and this meant that it was almost impossible for him to weave his way in and out of the crowd during rush hours. So at the end of this month, Krumholz was planning to give him a surprise. He was planning to retire the old man, with a big bonus and a pension. In other words, Mom, if poor Irving could only have held out against Grady's insults for a few more weeks, he would've been free of them forever." I shook my head. "It's a sad case, Mom, a very sad case."

Mom shook her head back and forth, and said, "Oh, yes, a sad case, a sad sad case," and for a moment I had a slight suspicion that she was making fun of me. Then her head snapped up and she produced a huge magnificent snort of contempt — and believe me, this is one accomplishment of which Mom is a master. "Sad? It's a tragedy! We should have a funeral over it! And it should be followed by a *minyan!* Not for this Irving — for the police department, that can't see in front of its face its own nose! Irving I'm not worried about — Irving will be out of jail tomorrow —"

"Mom, what are you talking about? Nobody can do anything for Irving! He's —"

"*I* can do something for Irving. I can prove to you he didn't do the murder, and I can show you who did."

"I don't believe it, Mom."

She lifted her chin, very dignified. "So how much do you wish to bet? I'm needing some new wallpaper for my bedroom. If I do what I said, you'll

come Sunday and put it up for me?"

"But Mom, Shirley was going to take me to the Metropolitan Museum of Art on Sunday. Sunday is the day Shirley exposes me to culture."

"Culture can wait. If I show you who's the murderer, you'll expose yourself to my wallpaper?"

I hesitated just a moment, then Shirley spoke, "Go ahead, David. You surely don't think you're going to lose."

I nodded. "All right, Mom, it's a bet."

Mom reached across the table and shook my hand. Then she leaned back, put a big satisfied smile on her face, and said, "So now, here's the solution. First of all, I prove to you that Irving *couldn't* be the poisoner. It's the third important point I mentioned. Irving is an old man, you said. He can't do his job so good no more, you said. Especially he can't lift a heavy tray with one hand no more — both hands he needs, you said. All right, so yesterday for lunch, when he brought the noodle soup to this Grady, did he bring it on a heavy tray or a light tray? On a heavy tray — you told me it yourself. On the same tray with the two noodle soups, you said, was also two bottles beer, a Krumholz Special Peach Sundae, and a nesselrode pie. Not only a heavy tray, but a tray full of bottles and bowls and liquids and things that could spill and splash all over the place. Believe me, an old man like that Irving, who was already worried that he might make a mistake that this Grady could laugh at him for — believe me, this was one tray he was holding on to for dear life with *two* hands! And if he was holding on to it with two hands —"

"— then how was he able to drop the poison in the soup!" I said.

Mom nodded. "Exactly. Isn't it wonderful, what a brilliant son I got — when his mother does the thinking?"

I frowned a moment, thinking it over. Then I began to shake my head. "But, Mom, it's impossible. If Irving didn't put the poison in the soup, who did? Nobody else could have got at that soup while Irving was carrying it over to the table. And nobody could have got at it after Irving set it down in front of Grady, because Grady started eating it right away."

"So what about *before* the soup left the kitchen?"

"But that's even *more* impossible, Mom. Because Krumholz stood at the kitchen door and drank a whole spoonful of that soup —"

"Maybe," Mom said, raising a finger mysteriously. "And also, maybe not." She smiled around the table a moment, getting the most out of her scene, and then she went on, "This brings me to another one of my important points. What did this Grady order *after* his noodle soup? I asked you. A Krumholz Three-Decker Pinochle Club Sandwich, you answered me. With bacon, with mayonnaise, with Russian dressing, with smoked herring, with salami. So I ask you, Davie — isn't this a little peculiar maybe?"

"Well, I think a man is crazy to

eat a thing like that, Mom, but otherwise it doesn't strike me as particularly —"

"Davie, Davie. One minute this Grady says to Irving, don't put any salt in my noodle soup, the doctor says I'll get a bad heartburn if I eat salt. And the next minute, he orders a sandwich with bacon, mayonnaise, smoked herring, Russian dressing, *and* salami — things which are absolutely full of salt! In fact, a sandwich like that, it's practically a salt mine!"

"Yes, Mom, I see what you mean. It *is* peculiar. But why —"

"Only one reason why. He was lying, Davie. When he said he didn't want no salt in his soup because of his heartburn, he was telling a big lie. What he wanted only was to be sure that Looie the cook should make one specific, particular, *special* soup for him and another one for his father-in-law, Dr. Bartlett, and that Irving shouldn't possibly get them mixed up and give Dr. Bartlett's soup to him and his soup to Dr. Bartlett. So to make sure of this, he tells this lie about wanting a bowl of soup that don't have no salt in it."

"But why, Mom? Why should Grady have cared which bowl of soup got to him and which one got to Dr. Bartlett?"

"Because, Davie, this Grady didn't want by accident to get the bowl of soup that Looie the cook put the Potash and Cyanide into."

For a second my confusion was great, and I merely gaped. I seem to spend a great deal of my time with Mom, merely gaping. Finally I got hold of myself and said, "Mom, do you mean — that Grady and Looie—"

"— was planning to poison old Dr. Bartlett," Mom said. "Not only do I mean this, but it's the only thing I *could* mean. Dr. Bartlett didn't have no motive to kill this Grady. But such a motive did Grady have to kill Dr. Bartlett! Grady was broke, Dr. Bartlett was a man with a Park Avenue penthouse. Dr. Bartlett dies, his daughter Mrs. Grady no doubt collects all the money, plus the Park Avenue penthouse, and Grady can put on some more flops again. A perfect motive! And who should he have for a partner in this murder? Who was it that made the soup in the first place, so he could make absolutely sure that the poison got into the right bowl? Who was it that was a big favorite with this Grady, that got big tips from him and catered at his parties? Who was it that could get to the rat poison with no trouble at all? Looie the cook — who else?"

I nodded my head enthusiastically. "Yes, Mom, you're right, he was the only one —" I stopped short. "But Mom," I said, "it's impossible! Looie *can't* be guilty. First of all, it wasn't Dr. Bartlett's soup — the soup with salt in it — that got poisoned, it was Grady's soup — the soup *without* salt in it. And second of all, Krumholz himself *tasted* that bowl of soup —"

"Both these problems," Mom said, "have got the same answer."

"What is it, Mom? I don't see it."

"What is it? It's what I said before.

This Grady reminds me of a cousin of your late father. His cousin Sadie Schwartz, to be exact."

"Did *she* get poisoned too, Mom?"

"No, she didn't get poisoned. The resemblance is strictly a matter from personality. Is a murder case a special department in life? It's like everything else — it's people's personalities that count. Your father's cousin Sadie Schwartz, such an aggravation she was! A regular *schmendrick*! Nothing satisfied her, always yelling at people, always saying insulting things. The rest of the family, they wouldn't stand for it, they yelled at her and said insulting things right back at her. Believe me, I could tell you about one time when I myself — and usually I'm a perfect lady — but this is outside of the point. The point is, what about those poor *schlimazls* who weren't in a position they could yell and insult right back at her? What about the people that depended on her, that made money from her, that sold her things? So how did *these* people get their revenge on cousin Sadie? Well, Davie, it's always the case in life. The worm turns — but he turns like a worm does, not like a man does. He turns in a *little* way, underground, so you couldn't hardly notice he was turning. When a worm wants to get his revenge on somebody, he don't make a lot of *big* trouble for that somebody, like shooting a hole in his head — he makes some kind of little, annoying, *minor* trouble, which sometimes is even worse than a hole in the head. Like Cousin Sadie —"

"Mom, will you *please* get to the point!"

"Cousin Sadie and the plumber," Mom repeated, with a sharp look. "For months and months, Cousin Sadie was getting on the nerves of the plumber. And why not? A woman with a voice like that, she'd get on a rabbi's nerves. So what does the plumber do, when Cousin Sadie yells at him because he didn't fix the pipes right? Does he knock her skull in with a wrench? Absolutely not. He gets his revenge in a *little* way. He smiles and bows and says, 'Yes, ma'am, I'll fix the pipes over again.' And then he fixes them so that, from then on, at 12 o'clock midnight every night, for one whole hour, cousin Sadie's pipes start to give a bang — bang! bang! bang! — for one whole hour, and is absolutely nothing nobody can do about it! For two months cousin Sadie don't get to sleep at night until after 1 o'clock —"

"Mom," I said, my voice getting a little hoarse by now, "what has this got to do with the murder case —?"

"This Grady," Mom says, "he reminds me of cousin Sadie. And Irving the waiter, he reminds me of the plumber. Does Irving get his revenge on this Grady in a big way — no, he don't. In a *little* way he gets it. He's a poor old man, but he's not so poor or so old that he can't get his revenge. This Grady tells him that he can't have salt in the soup. He tells him that if he has any salt he'll get a bad heartburn. So Irving says to himself, 'All right, so this is how it's going to be.

Do you insult me and accuse me of putting my thumb in the soup? All right, so I'll *give* you your heartburn."

"I get it, Mom, I get it!" I cried. "Looie the cook put the poison in Dr. Bartlett's soup, after he poured it out of the vat. The soup that Krumholz tasted at the kitchen door wasn't Dr. Bartlett's soup, it was the soup that Looie made specially. It was Grady's soup — so naturally Krumholz wasn't poisoned. But when Irving brought the order to the table, he *switched* soups! He gave Dr. Bartlett the soup that was meant for Grady, and he gave Grady the soup that was meant for Dr. Bartlett. In this way, he thought that he was going to give Grady a case of heartburn — and without knowing it, he *killed* him!"

Mom settled back in her chair with a deep sigh. "Believe me, Davie," she said, "I couldn't have said it better myself. — And don't forget," she added, "I'm expecting you up here Sunday, to put up that wallpaper."

"Just a moment, Mother," Shirley said. "I'm afraid I'm not satisfied. I'm afraid there's one little loophole which completely destroys your theory."

"So?" Mom said, cocking her head forward with polite curiosity.

"Everything you say is based on the assumption that the old waiter — Irving, is that his name? — switched the two bowls of soup, so that the murdered man would get the one with salt. Am I correct?"

Mom nodded.

"But how, Mother dear," and in spite of her polite tone, I could see the little gleam of anticipation in Shirley's eye, "how did Irving hope to get away with this scheme? Didn't he realize — how could he *help* but realize — that as soon as the victim tasted the soup and discovered that there was salt in it, he wouldn't eat another spoonful? Therefore, he *wouldn't* get heartburn, and Irving would merely have succeeded in making trouble for himself. Now then, Mother, how do you explain *that*?"

Mom folded her arms across *her* chest and smiled back at Shirley just as confidently. "I explain it, Shirley darling, in two words. Horse-radish. Before he got the soup, Grady finished an order of Blue Point oysters with horse-radish — Krumholz's famous horse-radish — the strongest horse-radish in New York, like the slogan says. So believe me, Irving knew that Grady wouldn't be able to taste whether his soup had salt in it or not. After you eat the strongest horse-radish in New York, believe me, you don't taste *anything*!"

Shirley sank back a little, with an astounded scowl on her face, and Mom turned to me calmly. "Sunday morning, Davie," she said. "Don't forget."

"But you certainly didn't *mean* that ridiculous bet, Mother," Shirley said, attempting a casual laugh. "You certainly don't intend to stand in the way of David's cultural development."

"Make it early," Mom said, without even looking at Shirley.

And frankly, I wasn't sorry. That Metropolitan Museum of Art always ruins my feet, anyway.

You may recall that when 101 YEARS' ENTERTAINMENT *finally appeared, after many years of research and book collecting, the contents pages were divided into various categories, including "The Great Detectives," "The Great Women Detectives," "The Great Humorous Detective Stories," "The Great Thieves," and "The Great Crime Stories." But before the definitive contents were decided upon, we considered the possibility of dividing "The Great Detectives" into separate categories, according to the* type *of detective; and one of these subdivisions was tentatively labeled "The Great Mystical Detectives." Now, surely a Chesterton story about Father Brown would have been included in this subdivision, and perhaps certain other more obscure characters. But one of the tales definitely slated for the mystical group was Ernest Bramah's "The Eastern Mystery," and you will know why when you have read this unaccountably neglected story about blind Max Carrados — a story so deeply reverent and so deeply moving that we cannot help wondering why it has not been reprinted before . . .*

THE EASTERN MYSTERY

by ERNEST BRAMAH

IT COULD SCARCELY BE CALLED Harris's fault, whatever the driver next behind might say in the momentary bitterness of his heart. In the two-fifths of a second of grace at his disposal Mr. Max Carrados' chauffeur had done all that was possible and the bunt that his radiator gave the stair-guard of the London General in front was insignificant. Then a Railway Express Delivery skated on its dead weight into his luggage platform and a Pickford, turning adroitly out of the mêlée, slewed a stationary Gearless round by its hand-rail stanchion to spread terror and great confusion in the other line of traffic.

The most unconcerned person, to all appearance, was the driver of the London General, the vehicle whose sudden stoppage had initiated the riot of confusion. He had seen a man, engrossed to the absolute exclusion of his surroundings by something that took his eye on the opposite footpath, dash into the road and then, brought up suddenly by a realization of his position, attempt to retrace his steps. He had pulled up so expertly that the man escaped, so smoothly that not a passenger was jarred, and now he sat with a dazed and vacant expression on his face, leaning forward on his steering wheel,

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while caustic inquiry and retort winged unheeded up and down the line behind him.

It was not until the indispensable ceremony of everyone taking everyone else's name and number had been observed under the authority of the tutelary constable that the single occupant of the private car stirred to show any interest in the proceedings.

"Parkinson," he called quietly, summoning his attendant to the window. "Ask Mr. Tulloch if he will come round here when he has finished with the policeman."

"Mr. Tulloch, sir?"

"Yes; you remember Dr. Tulloch of Netherhempsfield? He is out in front there."

A moment later Jim Tulloch, as genial as of old, but his exuberance temporarily damped by the cross-bickering in which he had just been involved, thrust his head and arm through the sash.

"Lord, it really is you then, Wynn,* old man?" he cried. "When your Parkinson came up I simply couldn't believe it. The world grows smaller, I declare."

"At all events this car does," responded Carrados, wringing the hearty, outstretched hand. "They've got us two inches less than the makers ever intended. Is it your doing, Jim?"

"Did ever you hear such a thing?" protested Tulloch. "And yet that wall-eyed atrocity yonder has kidded the copper that if he hadn't stopped dead — well, I should."

"Was it a near thing?" asked Carrados confidentially.

"Well, strictly between ourselves, I don't mind admitting that it might have been something of a shave," confessed Tulloch, with a cheerful grin. "But, Lord bless you, Wynn, the streets of London are paved with 'em nowadays. You don't merely take your life in your hands if you want to get about; you carry it on each foot."

"Look here," said Carrados. "You never let me know that you were up in town, Tulloch. What are you doing today?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," interrupted Parkinson's respectful voice, "but the policeman wishes to speak with you, sir."

"With me?" queried Tulloch restlessly. "Oh, good Lord, have we to go into all that again?"

"It's only the bus-driver, sir," apologized the constable with the tactful deference that the circumstances seemed to demand. "As you are a doctor — I think there's something the matter with him."

"I'm sure there is," assented Tulloch. "All right, I'm coming. Are you in a hurry, Wynn?"

"I'll wait," was the reply.

The doctor found his patient propped up on a doorstep. Having, as he expressed it afterwards, "run the rule over him," he prescribed a glass of water and an hour's rest. The man was shaken, that was all.

"Nerves, Wynn," he announced when he returned to his friend. "I

* *Max Carrados's original surname.*

don't quite understand his emotion, but the shock of not having run over me seems to have upset the poor fellow."

"I was asking you whether you were doing anything today," said Carrados. "Can you come back with me to Richmond?"

"I'm not doing anything as far as that goes," admitted Tulloch. "In fact," he added ruefully, "that's the plague of it. I'm waiting to hear from a man who's waiting to hear from another man, and *he's* depending on something that may or mayn't, you understand."

"Then you can come along now. Get in."

"If it's dinner you mean, I can't come straight away, you know," protested Tulloch. "Look at me togs" — he stood back to display a serviceable Norfolk suit — "all right for the 6:30 sharp of a Bloomsbury boarding house, but — eh, what?"

"Don't be an ass, Jim," said the blind man amiably. "I can't see your silly togs."

"No ladies or any of your tony friends?"

"Not a soul."

"The fact is," confided Tulloch, taking his place in the car, "I've been out of things for a bit, Wynn, and I'm finding civilization a shade cast-iron now. I've been down in the wilds since you were with me."

"I wondered where you were. I wrote to you about six months ago and the letter came back."

"Did it actually? Now that must have been almighty careless of someone, Wynn. I'm sorry; I'm a bit of a rolling stone, I suppose. When Darrish came back to Netherhempsfield my job was done there. I felt uncommonly restless. I hadn't much chance of buying a practice or dropping into a partnership worth having and I jibbed at setting up in some God-forsaken backwater and slipping into middle age 'building up a connection.' Lord, Carrados, the tragic monotony of your elderly professional nonentity! I've known men who've whispered to me between the pulls at confidential pipes that they've come to hate the streets and the houses and the same old everlasting silly faces that they met day after day until they began to think very queer thoughts of how they might get away from it all."

"Yes," said Carrados.

"Anyway, 'Not yet,' I promised myself, and when I got the chance of a temporary thing on a Red Cable liner I took it like a shot. That was something. If there was a mighty sameness about it after a bit, it wasn't the sameness I'd been accustomed to. Then, as luck of one sort or another would have it, I got laid out with a broken ankle on a Bombay quay."

Carrados voiced commiseration.

"But you made a very good mend of it," he said. "It's the left, of course. I don't suppose anyone ever notices it."

"I took care of that," replied Tulloch. "But it was a slow business

and threw all my plans out. I was on a very loose end when one day, outside the Secretariat, as they call it, I ran up against a man called Fraser whom I'd known building a viaduct or something of that sort in the Black Country.

" 'What on earth are *you* doing here?' we naturally both said at once, and he was the first to reply.

" 'I'm just off to repair an irrigation "bund" a thousand miles more or less away, and I'm looking for a doctor who can speak six words of Hindustani, and doesn't mind things as they are. What are you doing?'

" 'Good Lord, old man,' I said, 'I was looking for you!' "

It only required an occasional word to keep Tulloch going, and Carrados supplied it. He heard much that did not interest him — of the journey inland, of the face of the country, the surprising weather, the great work of irrigation, and the other impressive wonders of man and nature. These things could be got from books, but among the weightier cargo Tulloch now and again touched off some inimitable phase of life or told an uninventable anecdote of native character.

Yet the buoyant doctor had something on his mind, for several times he stopped abruptly on the edge of a reminiscence, as though he was doubtful, if not of the matter, at least of the manner in which he should begin. These indications were not lost on his friend, but Carrados made no attempt to press him, being very well assured that sooner or later the ingenuous Jim would find himself beyond retreat. The occasion came with the cigarettes after dinner. There had been a reference to the language.

"I often wished that I was a better stick at it," said Tulloch. "I'd picked up a bit in Bombay and of course I threw myself into it when Fraser got me the post. I managed pretty well with the coolies in the camp, but when I tried to have a word with the ryots living round — little twopenny ha'penny farmers, you know — I could make no show of it. A lot of queer fish you come across out there, in one way or another, you take my word. You never know whether a man's a professional saint of extreme holiness or a hereditary body-snatcher whose shadow would make a begging leper consider himself unclean until he had walked 70 miles to drink a cupful of filthy water out of a stinking pond that a pock-marked ascetic had been sitting in for three years in order to contemplate quietly."

"Possibly he really was unclean — in consequence or otherwise," suggested Carrados.

"Help!" exclaimed Tulloch tragically. "There are things that have to be seen. But then so was the sanctified image, so that there's nothing for an outsider to go by. And then all the different little lots with their own particular little heavens and their own one exclusive way of getting there, and their social frills and furbelows — Jats and Jains and Thugs and Mairs and Gonds and Bhills

and Toms, Dicks, and Harrys — suburban society is nothing to it, Wynn, nothing at all. There was a strange old joker I've had in mind to tell you about, though it was no joke for him in the end. God alone knows where he came from, but he was in the camp one evening juggling for stray coppers in a bowl. Pretty good juggling too it seemed to be, of the usual Indian kind — growing a plant out of a pumpkin seed, turning a stick into a live snake, and the old sword and basket trick that every Eastern conjurer keeps up his sleeve; but all done out in the open, with people squatting round and a simplicity of appliance that would have taken all the curl out of one of your music-hall magicians. With him he had a boy, his son, a misshapen, monkey-like anatomy of about ten, but there was no doubt that the man was desperately fond of his unattractive offspring.

"That night this ungainly urchin, taking a cooler in one of the big irrigation canals, got laid hold of by an alligator and raised the most unearthly screech anything human ever got out. I seemed to have had something prominent to do with the damp job of getting as much of him away from the creature as we could, and old Calico — that's what we anglicized the juggler's name into — had some sort of idea of being grateful in consequence. Although I don't doubt that he'd have put much more faith in a local wizard if one had been available, he let us take the boy into the hospital tent and do what we could for him. It wasn't much, and I told my assistant to break it to poor old Calico that he must be prepared for the worst. A handy man, that assistant, Wynn. He was a half-bred 'Portugoose,' as they say in Bombay, with the name of Vasque d'Almeydo, and I understood that he'd had some training. When we got out there he said that it was all the same to him, but he admitted quite blandly that he was really a cook and nothing more. What about his excellent testimonials? I asked him, and he replied with cheerful impenitence that he had bought them in the open market for one rupee eight, adding feelingly that he would willingly have given twice as much to qualify for my honorable service. In the end he did pretty much as he liked, and as he could speak five languages and scramble through seven dialects I was glad to have him about on any terms. I don't quite know how he broke it, but when I saw him later he said that Calico was a 'great dam fool.' He was a conjurer and knew how tricks were done and yet he had set out at once for some place 30 miles away — to procure a charm of some sort, the Portuguese would swear from a hint he had got. Vasque laughed pleasantly as he commented on native credulity. The next day the boy died and an hour later poor Calico came reeling in. He'd got a nasty cut over the eye and a map of the route drawn over him in thorns

and blisters and sand-burns, but he'd got something wrapped away in a bit of rag carried in the left armpit, and I felt for the poor old heathen. When he understood, he borrowed a spade and, taking up the child just as he was, he went off into the pagan solitude to bury him. I'd got used to these simple ways by that time.

"I thought that I'd seen the end of the incident, but late that night I heard the sentry outside challenge someone — we'd had so many tools and things looted by 'friendlies' that they'd lent us half a company of Sikhs from Kharikhas — and a moment later Calico was salaaming at the tent door. As it happened, Vasque was away at a village, trafficking for some ducks, and I had to grapple with the conversation as best I could — no joke, I may tell you, for the juggler's grasp on conventional Urdu was about as slender as my own. And the first thing he did was to put his paws on to my astonished feet, then up to his forehead, and to prostrate himself to the ground.

" 'Sahib,' he protested earnestly, 'I am thy slave and docile elephant for that which thou hast done for the man-child of my house.'

"Now you know, Wynn, I simply can't stand that sort of thing. It makes me feel such a colossal ass. So I tried, ungraciously enough, to cut him short. But it couldn't be done. Poor old Calico had come to discharge what weighed on him as a formidable obligation and my 'Don't mention it, old chap,' was quite out of the picture. Finally, from some obscure fold of his outfit, he produced a little screw of cloth and began to unwrap it.

" 'Take it, O sahib, and treasure it as you would a cup of water in the desert, for it has great virtue of the hidden kind. Condescend to accept it, for it is all I have worthy of so great a burden.'

" 'I couldn't think of it, Khaligar,' I said, trying to give his name a romantic twist, for the other sounded like guying him. 'I've done nothing, you know, and in any case this is much more likely to work with you than with me — an unbeliever. What is it, anyway?'

" 'It is the sacred tooth of the ape-god Hanuman and it protects from harm,' he replied, reverently displaying what looked to me like an old rusty nail. 'Had I but been able to touch so much as the hem of the garment of my manlet with it before the hour of his outgoing he would assuredly have recovered.'

" 'Then keep it for your own protection,' I urged. 'I expect that you run more risks than I do.'

" 'When the flame has been extinguished from a candle the smoke lingers but a moment before it also fades away,' he replied. 'Thy servant has no wish to live now that the light of his eyes has gone out, nor does he seek to avert by magic that which is written on his forehead.'

" 'Then it is witchcraft?' I said, pointing to the amulet.

" 'I know not,' he answered, 'but if

it be witchcraft it is of the honorable sort and not the goety of Sahitan. For this cause it is only of avail to one who acquires it without treachery or guile. Take it, sahib, but do not suffer it to become known even to those of your own table.'

" 'Why not?' I asked.

" 'Who should boast of pearls in a camp of armed bandits?' he replied evasively. 'A word spoken in a locked closet becomes a beacon on the hill-top for men to see. Yet have no fear; harm cannot come to you, for your hand is free from complicity.'

"I hadn't wanted the thing before, but that settled me. I very much doubted how the conjurer had got possession of it and I had no wish to be mixed up in an affair of any sort. I told him definitely that while I appreciated his motives I shouldn't deprive him of so great a treasure. He seemed really concerned, and Fraser told me afterwards that for one of that tribe to be under what he regarded as an unrequited obligation was a dishonor. I should probably have had some trouble to get him off, only just then we heard Vasque returning. Calico hastily wrapped up the relic, stowed it away among his wardrobe, and, with his most ceremonious salaam, disappeared.

" 'Do you know anything about the tooth of the ape-god Hanuman, Vasque?' I asked him some time later. The 'Portugoose' seemed to know a little about everything and in consequence of my dependence on him he strayed into a rather more free and easy manner than might have passed under other conditions. but I'm not ceremonious, you know, Wynn."

And Carrados laughed and agreed.

" 'The sacred tooth of Sira Hanuman, sir?' said Vasque. 'Oh, that's all great tom dam foolery. There are a hundred million of them. The most notable one was worshipped at the Mountain of Adam in Ceylon until it was captured by my ancestor, the illustrious Admiral d'Almeydo, who sent it with much pomp and circumstance to Goa. Then the Princes of Malabar offered a ransom of rupees, 40 lakhs, for it, which the Bishop of Goa refused.'

" 'What became of it?' I asked, but Vasque didn't know. He was somewhat of a liar, in fact, and I daresay that he'd made it all up to show off his knowledge."

"No," objected Carrados; "I think that Baldæus, the Dutch historian, has a similar tale. What happened to Calico?"

"That was the worst of it. Some of our men found his body lying among the tamarisk scrub two days later. There was no doubt that he'd been murdered, and not content with that, the ghouls had mutilated him shamefully afterwards. Even his cheeks were slashed open. So, you see, the tooth of Hanuman had not protected him."

"No," assented Carrados, "it had certainly not protected him. Was anything done — anyone arrested?"

"I don't think so. You know what

the natives are in a case like that: no one knows anything, even if they have been looking on at the time. I suppose a report would be sent up, but I never heard anything more. I always had a suspicion that Calico, with his blend of simple faith and gipsy blood, had violated a temple, or looted a shrine, to try to save his son's life, and that the guardians of the relic tracked him and revenged the outrage. Anyway, I was glad that I hadn't accepted it after that, for I had enough excitement without."

"What was that, Jim?"

"Oh, I don't know, but I always seemed to be running up against something about that time. Twice my tent was turned inside out in my absence, once my clothes were spirited away while I was bathing, and the night before we broke up the camp I was within an ace of being murdered."

"You bear a charmed life," said Carrados suggestively, but Tulloch did not rise to the suggestion.

"It was a bit of luck. Those dacoits are as quiet as death, but for some reason I woke suddenly with the idea that devilment was brewing. I slipped on the first few things that came to hand and went to reconnoitre. As I passed through the canvas I came face to face with a native, and two others were only a few yards behind. Without any ceremony the near man let drive at my throat with one of those beastly wavy daggers they go in for. I suppose I managed to dodge in the fraction of a second, for he missed me. I gave a yell for assistance, landed the leader one in the eye, and backed into my tent for a weapon. By the time I was out again our fellows were running up, but the precious trio had disappeared."

"That was the last you saw of them?" asked Carrados tentatively.

"No, queerly enough. The day I sailed I encountered the one whose eye I had touched up. It was down by the water — the Apollo Bander — at Bombay, and I was so taken aback, never thinking but that the fellow was hundreds of miles away, that I did nothing but stare. But I promised myself that in the unlikely event of ever seeing him again I would follow him up pretty sharply."

"Not under the wheels of a London General again, I hope!"

Tulloch's brown fist came down upon the table with a crash.

"The devil, Carrados!" he exclaimed. "How did you know?"

"Parkinson was just describing to me a rather exotic figure. Then the rest followed."

"Well, you were right. There was the man in Holborn, and of all the fantastic things in the world for a bloodthirsty thug from the back wilds of Hindustan, I believe that he was selling picture postcards!"

"Possibly a very natural thing to be doing in the circumstances."

"What circumstances, Wynn?"

"Those you are telling me of. Go on."

"That's about all there is. When I

saw the man I was so excited, I suppose, that I started to dash across without another thought. You know the result. Of course he had vanished by the time I could look round."

"You are quite sure he is the same?"

"There's always the possibility of a mistake, I admit," considered Tulloch, "but, speaking in ordinary terms, I should say that it's a moral certainty. On the first occasion it was bright moonlight and the sensational attack left a very vivid photograph on my mind. In Bombay I had no suspicion of doubt about the man, and he was still carrying traces of my fist. Here, it is true, I had less chance of observing him, but recognition was equally instantaneous and complete. Then consider that each time he has slipped away at once. No, I am not mistaken. What is he after, Wynn?"

"I am very much afraid that he is after you, my friend," replied Carrados, with some concern lurking behind the half-amused voice.

"After me!" exclaimed Tulloch with righteous indignation. "Why, confound his nerve, it ought to be the other way about. What's he after me for?"

"India is a conservative land. The gods do not change. A relic that was apprised at 700,000 ducats in the days of Queen Elizabeth is worth following up today — apart, of course, from the merit thereby acquired by a devotee."

"You mean that Calico's charm was the real original thing that Vasque spoke of?"

"It is quite possible; or it may be claimed for it even if it is not. Goa has passed through many vicissitudes; its churches and palaces are now in ruins. What is more credible ——"

"But in any case I haven't got the thing. Surely the old ass needn't murder me to find out that."

The face he appealed to betrayed nothing of the thoughts behind it. But Carrados's mind was busy with every detail of the story he had heard, and the more he looked into it the less he felt at ease for his impetuous friend's safety.

"On the contrary," he replied, "from the pious believer's point of view, the simplest and most effective way of ascertaining it was to try to murder you, and your providential escape has only convinced them that you are now the holder of the charm."

"The deuce!" said Tulloch ruefully. "Then I have dropped into an imbroglio after all. What's to be done?"

"I wonder," mused the blind man speculatively, "I wonder what really became of the thing."

"You mean after Calico's death?"

"No, before that. I don't imagine that your entertaining friend had it at the end. He had nothing to look forward to, you remember; he did not wish to live. His assassins were those who were concerned in the recovery of the relic, for why else was he mutilated but in order to discover whether he had concealed it with more than superficial craft —

perhaps even swallowed it? They found nothing or you would not have engaged their attention. As it was, they were baffled and had to investigate further. Then they doubtless learned that you had put this man under an undying obligation, possibly they even knew that he had visited you the last thing before he left the camp."

"It seems likely enough in an incredible sort of way," admitted the doctor. "But I don't see why this old sport should be occupying himself as he is in the streets of London."

"That remains to be looked into. It may be some propitiatory form of self-abasement that is so potent in the Oriental system. But it may equally well be something quite different. If this man is of high priestly authority there are hundreds of his co-religionists here at hand whose lives he could command in such a service. He may be in communication with some, or be contriving to make himself readily accessible. Are there any Indians at your boarding house?"

"I have seen a couple recently."

"Recently! Then they came after you did?"

"I don't know about that. I haven't had much to do with the place."

"I don't like it, Jim," said Carrados, with more gravity than he was accustomed to put into the consideration of his own risks.

"Well, for that matter, I'm not exactly pining for trouble," replied his friend. "But I can take care of myself anyway."

"But you can't," retorted Carrados. "That's just the danger. If you were blind it would be all right, but your credulous, self-opinionated eyes will land you in some mess. . . . Tomorrow, at all events, Carlyle shall put a watch on this enterprising Hindu and we shall at least find out what his movements are."

Tulloch would have declined the attention, but Carrados was insistent.

"You must let me have my way in such an emergency, Tulloch," he declared. "Of course you would say that it's out of your power to prevent me, but among friends one acquiesces to a certain code. I say this because I may even find it necessary to put a man on you as well. This business attracts me resistlessly. There's something more in it than we have got at yet, something that lies beyond the senses and strives to communicate itself through the unknown dimension that we have all stood just upon the threshold of, only to find that we have lost the key. It's more elusive than Macbeth's dagger: 'I have thee not and yet I see thee still' — always just out of reach. What is it, Jim; can't you help us? Don't you feel something portentous in the air, or is it only my blind eyes that can see beyond?"

"Not a bit of it," laughed Tulloch cheerfully. "I only feel that a blighted old heathen is leading himself a rotten dance through his pig-headed obstinacy. Well, Wynn, why can't he be rounded up and have it explained that he's on the wrong tack?"

"He would not believe." Carrados was pacing the room in one of his rare periods of mental tension. Instinct, judgment, experience, and a subtler prescience that enveloped reason seemed at variance in his mind. Then he swung round and faced his visitor.

"Look here, Tulloch, stay with me for the present," he urged. "You can go there for your things tomorrow and I can fix you up in the meantime. It's safer; I feel it will be safer."

"Safer! Good Lord! What could you have safer than a stodgy second-rate boarding house in Hapsburg Square? The place drones respectability. Miss Vole, the landlady, is related to an archdeacon and nearly all the people there are on half-pay. The two Indians are tame baboos. Besides, if I get this thing I told you of, I shall be off to South America in a few days, and that ought to shake off this old man of the tooth."

"Of course it won't; nothing will shake him off if he's made the vow. Well, have it your own way. One can't expect a doctor of robust habit to take any reasonable precautions, I know. How is your room situated?"

"Pretty high up. Next to the attic, I imagine. It must be, because there is a little trap-door in the ceiling leading there."

"A trap-door leading to the attic! Well, at all events there is no four-post bed with a canopy that slides up and down; nor a revolving wardrobe before a secret passage?"

"Get on with you," retorted Tulloch. "It's just the ordinary contrivance that you find in every roof when the attic isn't made into rooms. There's nothing in it."

"Possibly; but there may be. Anyway, drive a tack in and hang up a tin can or something that must clatter down if the door is raised an inch. You have a weapon, I suppose?"

"Now you're talking, Wynn. I do put some faith in that. I have a grand little revolver in my bag and I can sleep like a feather when I want."

"Little? What size does it take?"

"Oh, well, it's a .320, if it comes to that. I prefer a moderate bore myself."

Carrados opened a drawer of his desk and picked up half a dozen brass cartridges.

"When you get back, throw out the old ones and reload with these to oblige me," he said. "Don't forget."

"Right," assented Tulloch, examining them with interest; "but they look just like mine. What are they? — something new?"

"Not at all; but we know that they are charged and you can rely on them going off if they are fired."

"What a chap you are," declared Tulloch with something of the admiring pity that summed up the general attitude towards Max Carrados. "Well, I must be going off myself, old man. I'm hoping for a letter about that little job and if it comes I want to answer it tonight. You've

given me a fine time and we've had a great talk."

"I'm glad we met. And if you go away suddenly don't leave it to chance the next time you are back." He did not seek to detain his guest, for he knew that Tulloch was building somewhat on the South American appointment. "Shall Harris run you home?"

"Not a bit of it. I'll enjoy a walk to the station, and these Tubes of yours'll land me within me loose-box by eleven. It's a fine place, this London, after all."

They had reached the front door, opened it, and were standing for a moment looking towards the yellow cloud that arched the west end of the city like the mirage of a dawn.

"Well, goodbye, old man," said Tulloch heartily, and they shook hands. At the touch an extraordinary impulse swept over Carrados to drag his friend back into the house, to implore him to remain the night, or to do something to upset the arranged order of things for the next few hours. With the cessation of physical contact the vehemence of the possession dwindled away, but the experience, short as it was, left Carrados white and shaken. He could not trust himself to speak; he waved his hand and, turning quickly, went back to the room where they had sat together to analyze the situation and to determine how to act. Presently he rang for his man.

"Some notes were taken after that little touch in Holborn this afternoon, Parkinson," he said. "Have you the address of the leading motor-bus driver among them?"

"The London General, sir?"

"Yes; the man who was the first to stop."

Parkinson produced his memorandum book and referred to the latest of its entries.

"He gave his private residence as 14 Cogg's Lane, Brentford, sir."

"Brentford! That is fortunate. I am going to see him tonight if possible. You will come with me, Parkinson. Tell Harris to get out the car. What is the time?"

"Ten seventeen, sir."

"We will start in fifteen minutes. In the meanwhile just hand me that large book labeled 'Xavier' from the top shelf there."

"Yes, sir. Very well, sir. I will convey your instructions to Harris, sir."

It was perhaps rather late for a casual evening call, but not, apparently, too late for Cogg's Lane, Brentford. Mr. Fitzwilliam — Parkinson had infused a faint note of protest into his voice when he mentioned the bus-driver's name — Mr. Fitzwilliam was out, but Mrs. Fitzwilliam received the visitor with conspicuous felicity and explained the circumstances. Fitzwilliam was of a genial, even playful, disposition, but he had come home brooding and depressed. Mrs. Fitzwilliam had not taken any notice of it — she put it down to his feet — but by cajolery and innuendo she had persuaded him

to go to the picture palace to be cheered up, and as it was now on the turn of 11 he might be expected back at any moment. In the meantime, the lady had a favorite niece who was suffering — as the doctor himself confessed — from a very severe and unusual form of adenoids. Carrados disclosed the fact that the subject of adenoids was one that interested him deeply. He knew, indeed, of a case that was thought by the patient's parents to be something out of the way, but even it, he admitted, was commonplace by the side of the favorite niece. The minutes winged.

"That's Fred," said Mrs. Fitzwilliam, as the iron gate beyond the little plot of beaten earth that had once been a garden gave its individual note. "Seems strange that they should be so ignorant at a hospital, doesn't it?"

"Hallo, what now?" demanded Mr. Fitzwilliam, entering.

Mrs. Fitzwilliam made a sufficient introduction and waited for the interest to develop. So far the point of Carrados' visit had not appeared.

"I believe that you know something about motors?" inquired the blind man.

"Well, what if I do?" retorted the bus-driver. His attitude was protective rather than intentionally offensive.

"If you do, I should be glad if you would look at the engine of my car. It got shaken, I fancy, in a slight accident that we had in Holborn this afternoon."

"Oh!" The driver looked hard at Carrados, but failed to get behind an expression of mild urbanity. "Why didn't you say so at first?" he grumbled. "All right; I'll trot round with you. Shan't be long, missis."

He led the way out and closed the door behind them, not ceasing to regard his visitor with a distrustful curiosity. At the gate he stopped, having by that time brought his mind round to the requirements of the situation, and faced Carrados.

"Look here," he said, "what's up? You don't want me to look at no bloomin' engine, you know. I don't half like the whole bally business, let me tell you. What's the game?"

"It's a very simple game for you if you play it straightforwardly," answered Carrados. "I want to know just how much you had to do with saving that man's life in Holborn today."

Fitzwilliam instinctively fell back a step and his gaze on Carrados quickened in its tensity.

"What d'yer mean?" he demanded with a quality of apprehension in his voice.

"That is complicating the game," replied Carrados mildly. "You know exactly what I mean."

"And what if I do?" demanded the driver. "What have you got to do with it?"

"I happened to be in the car following you. We were scraped, but I am not making any claim for damages. I am satisfied that you did very well indeed in the circumstances, and if a

letter to your people — I know one of the directors — saying as much would be of any use to you ——"

"Now we're getting on, sir," was the mollified admission. "You mustn't mind a bit of freshness, so to speak. You took me by surprise, that's what it was, and I've been wound up ever since that happened." He hesitated, and then flung out the question almost with a passionate directness: "What was it, sir? In God's name, what was it?"

"What was it?" repeated the blind man's level voice persuasively.

"It wasn't me. I couldn't have done nothing. I didn't see the man, not in time to have an earthly. Then we stopped. Good Lord, I've never felt a stop like that before. It was as though a rubber band had tightened and pulled us up against ten yards squoze into one, so that you didn't hardly know it. I hadn't nothing to do with it. Not a brake was on, and the throttle open and the engine running. There we were. And me half silly."

"You did very well," said Carrados soothingly.

"I did nothing. If it had been left to me there'd have been an inquest. You seem to have noticed something, sir. How do you work it out?"

Carrados parried the question with a disingenuous allusion to the laws of chance. He had not yet worked it out, but he was not disposed to lay his astonishing conclusions, so far as they went, before the bus-driver's crude discrimination. He had learned what he wanted. With a liberal acknowledgment of the service, he bade Mr. Fitzwilliam good night and returned to his waiting car.

"Back home, Harris," he directed. He had gone out with some intention of including Hapsburg Square in his peregrination. He was now assured that his anxiety was groundless.

But the next morning all his confidence was shattered in a moment. It was his custom before and during breakfast to read by touch the headings of the various items in the newspapers and to mark for Greatorex's later reading such paragraphs as claimed his interest. Generally he could, with some inconvenience, distinguish even the ordinary type by the same faculty, but sometimes the inequality of pressure made this a laborious process. There was no difficulty about the larger types, however, and with a terrible misgiving, fingertip and brain had at once grasped the significance of a prominent heading:

FATAL GAS EXPLOSION

HAPSBURG SQUARE
BOARDING HOUSE IN FLAMES

"Are you there, Parkinson?" he called.

Parkinson could scarcely believe his well-ordered ears. Not since the early days of his affliction had Carrados found it necessary to ask such a question.

"Yes, sir, I'm here," he almost stammered in reply. "I hope you are not unwell, sir?"

"I'm all right, thanks," responded his master. "I was mentally elsewhere. I want you to read me this paragraph. It deeply concerns me."

"The one about Dr. Tulloch, sir?" The name had caught the man's eye at once. "Dear me, sir."

"Yes; go on," said Carrados, with his nearest approach to impatience.

" 'During the early hours of this morning,' " read Parkinson, " '52 Hapsburg Square was the scene of a gas explosion which was unhappily attended by loss of life. Shortly after midnight the neighborhood was alarmed by the noise of a considerable explosion which appeared to blow out the window and front wall of one of the upper bedrooms, but as the part in question was almost immediately involved in flames it is uncertain what really happened. The residents of the house, which is a boarding establishment carried on by Miss Vole (a relative, we are informed, of Archdeacon Vole of Worpsley), were quickly made aware of their danger and escaped. The engines arrived within a few minutes of the alarm and soon averted any danger of the fire spreading. When it was possible to penetrate into the upper part of the house it was discovered that the occupant of the bedroom where the explosion took place, a Dr. Tulloch who had only recently returned to this country from India, had perished. Owing to the charred state of the body it is impossible to judge how he died, but in all probability he was mercifully killed or at least rendered unconscious by the force of the explosion.' That is all, sir."

"I ought to have kept him," muttered Carrados reproachfully. "I ought to have insisted. The thing has been full of mistakes." He could discover very little further interest in his breakfast and turned to the other papers for possible enlargement of the details. "We shall have to go down," he said, "Tell Harris."

"Very well, sir."

Greatorex, just arrived for the day, put his head in at the door.

"Morning, sir," he nodded. "Tulloch's here and wants to see you. Came in with me. Hullo, Parkinson, seen a ghost?"

"He hasn't yet," volunteered his master. "But we both expect to. Yes, send him in here. Only one mistake the more, you see," he added to his servant. "And one the less," he added to himself.

"I might just as well have stayed, you know," was Tulloch's greeting, and going across to his friend he dropped a weighty hand upon his shoulder.

" 'There are more things in heaven and earth than in your philosophy, Horatio,' " he barbarously misquoted with significance. "There, you see, Wynn, I can apply Shakespeare to the situation as well as you."

"Quite so," assented Carrados. "In the meanwhile will you have some breakfast?"

"It's what I came in the hopes of," admitted the doctor. "That and being burned out of hearth and home. I

thought that I might as well quarter myself on you for a couple of days. You've seen the papers?"

His friend indicated the still-open front page.

"Ah, that one. *The Morning Reporter* gave me a better obituary. I often had a sort of morbid fancy to know what they'd say about me afterwards. It seemed unattainable, but, like most things, it's a sad disappointment when it comes. Six lines is the longest, Wynn, and they've got me degree wrong."

"Whose was the body?" asked Carrados.

Gravity descended upon Tulloch at the question. He looked round to make sure that Parkinson had left the room.

"No one will ever know, I'm hoping," he replied. "He was charred beyond recognition. But you know, Wynn, and I know, and we can hold our tongues."

"The Indian avenger, of course?"

"Yes. I went round there early this morning expecting nothing and found the place a wreck. One can only guess now what happened, but the gas-bracket is just beneath that trap-door I told you of and there's a light kept burning in the passage outside. One of the half-pay men brought me a nasty wavy dagger that had been picked up in the road. 'One of your Indian curiosities, I suppose, Dr. Tulloch?' he remarked. I let it pass at that, for I was becoming cautious midst so much devilment. 'I'm afraid that there's nothing else of yours left,' he went on, 'and there wouldn't have been this if it hadn't been blown through the window.' He was quite right. I haven't a thing left in the world but this Norfolk suit that I stand up in, and, as matters are, I'm jolly well glad you didn't give me time to change yesterday."

"Ah," assented Carrados thoughtfully. "Still the Norfolk suit, of course. Tell me, Jim, you had it in India?"

"To be sure I had. It was new then. You know, one doesn't always go about there in white drill and a cork helmet, as your artists here seem to imagine. It's cold sometimes, I can tell you. This coat is warm; I got very fond of it. You can't understand one getting fond of a mere suit, you with your 50 changes."

"Of course I can. I have a favorite jacket that I would not part from for rubies, and it's considerably more of an antique than yours. That's still a serviceable suit, Jim. Come and let me have a look at it."

"What d'ye mean?" said Tulloch, complying reluctantly. "You're making fun of me little suit and it's the only thing in the world that stands between me and the entire."

"Come here," repeated Carrados. "I am not in the least guying. I'm far too serious. I am more serious, I think, than I have ever been in my life before." He placed the wondering doctor before him and proceeded to run a light hand about the details of his garments, turning the doctor round until the process was complete.

"You wore these clothes when the native you call Calico came to you that night?"

"It's more than likely. The nights were cold."

Carrados seemed strangely moved. He got up, walked to the window, as his custom was, for enlightenment, and then, after wandering about the room, touching here and there an object indecisively, he unlocked a cabinet and slid out a tray of silver coins.

"You've never seen these, have you?" he asked.

"No, what are they?" responded Tulloch, looking on.

"Pagan art at its highest. The worship of the strong and beautiful."

"Worth a bit?" suggested Tulloch knowingly.

"Not what they cost." Carrados shot back the tray and paced the room again. "You haven't told me yet how you were preserved."

"How ——?"

"Last night. You know that once more you escaped death."

"I suppose I did. Yes. . . . And do you know why I have been hesitating to tell you?"

"Why?"

"Because you won't believe me."

Carrados permitted himself to smile.

"Try," he said laconically.

"Well, of course, I quite intended to. . . . The sober truth is, Wynn, that I forgot the address and could not get there. It was the silliest and the simplest thing in the world. I walked to the station here, booked for Russell Square, and took a train. When I got out I started off and then suddenly pulled up. Where was I going? My mind, on that one point, had developed a perfect blank. All the facts had vanished. Drum my encephalon how I might, I could not recall Miss Vole, 52, or Hapsburg Square. Mark you, it wasn't loss of memory in the ordinary sense. I remembered everything else; I knew who I was and what I wanted well enough. Of course the first thing I did was to turn out my pockets. I had letters, certainly, but none to that address and nothing else to help me. 'Very well,' I said, 'It's a silly game, but I'll walk round till I find it.' Had again! I walked for half an hour, but I saw nothing the faintest degree familiar. Then I saw 'London Directory Taken Here' in a pub. window. 'Good,' I thought. 'When I see the name it will all come back again.' I went in, had something, and looked through the 'Streets' section from beginning to end." He shook his head shrewdly. "It didn't work."

"Did it occur to you to ring me up? You'd given me the address."

"It did; and then I thought, 'No, it's midnight now' — it was by then — 'and he may have turned in early and be asleep.' Well, things had got to such a pass that it seemed the simplest move to walk into the first moderate hotel I came to, pay for my bed, and tell them to wake me at 6, and that's what I did. Now what do you make of that?"

"That depends," replied Carrados slowly. "The scientist would perhaps hint at a telepathic premonition operating subconsciously through receptive nerve centres. The sceptic would call it a lucky coincidence. The devoutly religious person would claim another miracle."

"Oh, come now!" protested Tulloch.

"Yes, come now," struck in Carrados, rising with decision and moving towards the door. "Come to my room and then you shall judge for yourself. It's too much for any one man to contemplate alone. Come on." He walked quickly across the hall to his study, dismissing Greatorex elsewhere with a word, and motioned the mystified doctor to a chair. Then he locked the door and sat down himself.

"I want you to carry your mind back to that night in your tent when the native Khaligar, towards whom you had done an imperishable service, presented himself before you. By the inexorable ruling of his class he was your bondsman in service until he had repaid you in kind. This, Jim, you failed to understand. You would not be repaid, and yet he wished to die."

The doctor nodded. "I daresay it comes to that," he said.

"He could not die with this debt undischarged. And so, in the obscurity of your tent, beneath your unsuspecting eyes, this conjurer did, as he was satisfied, requite you. You thought you saw him wrap the relic in its covering. You did not. You thought he put it back in his own clothes. He did not. Instead, he slipped it dexterously between the lining and the cloth of your own coat. You had seen him do much cleverer things even in the open sunlight."

"You don't say," exclaimed Tulloch, springing to his feet, "that even now ——"

"Wait!" cried the blind man warningly. "Don't seek it yet. You have to face a more stupendous problem."

"What is that?"

"Three times at least your life has been — as we may say — miraculously preserved. It was not your doing, your expertness, my friend. . . . What is this sacred relic that once was in its jeweled shrine on the high altar of the great cathedral at Goa, that opulent arch-bishopric of the East to which Portugal in the Sixteenth Century sent all that was most effective of treasure, brain, and muscle to conquer the body and soul of India?"

"You suggested that it might be the original relic to which Vasque had referred."

"The natives may have thought so. What would be more natural than that an ignorant despoiler should assume the thing which he found the most closely guarded and the most richly casketed to be the object for which he himself would have the deepest veneration?"

"Then I don't follow you," said Tulloch.

"Because I have the advantage of having turned to the local and historical records bearing on the circumstances since you first started me," Carrados replied. "For instance, in the year 1582 Akbar, who was a philosopher and a humorist as well as a model ruler, sent an invitation to the 'wise men among the Franks' at Goa to journey to Agra, there to meet in public controversy before him a picked band of Mohammedan mullas and prove the superiority of their faith. The challenge was accepted. Abu-l-Fazl records the curious business and adds a very significant detail. These priests, to cut the matter short in the spirit of the age, offered to walk through a fiery furnace in the defense of their belief. It came to nothing, because the other side backed out, but the challenge is suggestive because, however fond the priesthood of those times may have been of putting other people to the ordeal of fire and water, its members were singularly modest about submitting to such tests themselves. What mystery was there here, Tulloch? What had those priests of Goa that made them so self-confident?

"This relic, you suggest?"

"Yes, I do. But, now, what is that relic? A monkey's or an ape-god's tooth, an iron-stained belemnite, the fragment of a pagan idol — you and I can smile at that. We are Christians. No matter how unorthodox, no matter how noncommittal our attitude may have grown, there is upon us the unconscious and hereditary influence of century after century of blind and implicit faith. To you and to me, to everyone who has listened to the story as a little child, it is only conceivable that if miraculous virtues reside in anything inanimate it must pre-eminently be in the close accessories of that great world's tragedy, when, as even secular and unfriendly historians have been driven to admit, something out of the order of Nature did shake the heavens."

"But this," articulated Tulloch with dry throat, leaning instinctively forward from the pressure of his coat, "this — what is it, then?"

"You described it as looking like a nail," responded Carrados. "It is a nail. Rusty, you said, and it could not well be otherwise than red with rust. And old. More than 1900 years old."

Tulloch came unsteadily to his feet and slowly slipping off his coat he put it gently away on a table apart from where they sat.

"Is it possible?" he asked in an awestruck whisper. "Wynn, is it — is it really possible?"

"It is not only possible," he heard the blind man's more composed voice replying, "but in one aspect it is even very natural. Physically, we are dealing with an historical fact. Somewhere on the face of the earth these things must be enduring; scattered, buried, lost perhaps, but still existent. And among the thousands of relics that the different churches have made claim to, it would be remarkable indeed if some at least were not

authentic. That is the material aspect."

"Yes," assented Tulloch anxiously, "yes, that is simple, natural. But the other side, Carrados — the things that we know have happened — what of that?"

"That," replied Carrados, "is for each man to judge according to his light."

"But you?" persisted Tulloch. "Are you convinced?"

"I am offered a solution that explains everything when no other theory will," replied the blind man evasively. Then on the top of Tulloch's unsatisfied "Ah!" he added, "But there is something else that confronts you. What are you going to do?" and his face was towards the table across the room.

"Have you thought of that?"

"It has occurred to me. I wondered how you would act."

It was some time before either spoke again. Then Tulloch broke the silence.

"You can lend me some things?" he asked.

"Of course."

"Then I will decide," he announced with resolution. "Whatever we may think, whatever might be urged, I cannot touch this thing; I dare not even look on it. It has become too solemn, too awful, in my mind, to be seen by any man again. To display it, to submit it to the test of what would be called 'scientific proof,' to have it photographed and 'written up' — impossible, incredible! On the other hand, to keep it safely to myself — no, I cannot do that either. You feel that with me?"

The blind man nodded.

"There is another seemly, reverent way. The opportunity offers. I found a letter at the house this morning. I meant to tell you of it. I have got the appointment that I told you of and in three days I start for South America. I will take the coat just as it is, weight it beyond the possibility of recovery, and sink it out of the world in the deepest part of the Atlantic; beyond controversy, and safe from falling to any ignoble use. You can supply me with a box and lead. You approve of that?"

"I will help you," said Carrados.

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DEATH ON SATURDAY NIGHT

by Q. PATRICK

AFTER A PLEASANT DAY OF VACATION skiing, Lieutenant Trant of the New York Homicide Bureau strolled through the charming little New Hampshire village. The snow was falling gently and the festive Saturday night atmosphere was pretty as a Christmas carol. Trant had no difficulty in finding Dr. Benton's office, conspicuously labeled in the biggest building on the main street opposite the crowded car park of the movie house where the words TYRONE POWER, glaring from the marquee, hinted at the romantic delights of the evening show within.

Young Dr. Benton's evening office hours, catering to overenthusiastic skiers, continued until ten. That was why Trant, casually met and invited by the Bentons on the ski slopes for a late supper party, had been asked to join the doctor downtown rather than to go directly to their luxuriously simple log-cabin on the mountainside. The plan was that they would then drive out together.

He arrived at the entrance to the office simultaneously with a spectacular blonde in a chic bright red ski-suit which branded her as an out-of-towner from one of the smart ski lodges. While he followed her up the stairs, Trant hoped mildly that she was another guest of the Bentons'.

Trant and the blonde reached the second floor office together, and Dr. Benton, dark and ski-tanned, greeted them with a grin.

"Miss Rogers, this is Mr. Trant, a fellow New Yorker." On vacation Trant never told his profession. He found it put people off. As the blonde offered him a smooth gloved hand to press, Benton added: "Miss Rogers is my last patient, Trant. If you'll excuse me a moment, I'll be right with you."

He disappeared with the blonde into the inner office, leaving Trant to browse through magazines until five or so minutes later when the blonde re-emerged, drawing on gloves over ringed fingers.

"If you have any more trouble with that back in New York tomorrow, Miss Rogers, go to your own doctor."

Dr. Benton ushered the blonde off the premises and sighed. "Thank heavens, that's over for tonight, Trant. Dolly drove in with me. She's at the movies. Some picture she wanted to see. She should be out any minute. I'll just straighten up here, and we're all set."

It touched Trant that Mrs. Dolly Benton, who was reputedly the richest of the many rich residents, should be folksy enough to want to catch a movie. It altered his impression of

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her as a snobbish, haughty female.

As Dr. Benton was taking instruments from the sterilizer, the phone rang. "Get it, will you, Trant?"

Trant picked up the receiver. A woman's voice asked: "Ned?"

"I'll get him."

"Oh, it's Mr. Trant, isn't it? This is Dolly Benton. Be an angel and tell Neddy it's all over but the final clinch and I'm leaving. I won't bother to come up. I'll go straight to the car in the parking lot."

"All right, Mrs. Benton. How was the movie?"

"Oh, I adored it. I'm a drooling Tyrone Power fan."

As Trant imparted this information to the doctor, he could see, through the broad windows, the first patrons beginning to appear at the lighted mouth of the movie house. Then the phone rang again. Cursing softly, Dr. Benton answered it. His face went solemn. Dropping the receiver, he said:

"Some hysterical woman claims there's a dead body in the car park. Why didn't she call the police? Why pick on me?" He grabbed his medical bag. "Come on, Trant."

In a few seconds they were out in the parking lot. People were beginning to trail toward their cars, but there was no sign of a disturbance.

"Probably just a hoax, but we'd better investigate. You take these rows."

As Dr. Benton went off toward the farther lines of parked cars, Trant wandered, uneventfully, through the adjoining automobiles. He passed the movie house where the words TYRONE POWER, like a magic incantation, still loomed on the darkened marquee.

As he glanced at a vivid poster on which Mr. Power courageously outdueled four opponents he became conscious of the beelike hum of a collecting crowd. He ran toward the sound and reached a little awed circle clustered around the rear of a station wagon. Pushing through, he found Dr. Benton on his knees beside a prostrate woman. There was fresh blood on the snow and a chipped blood-stained brick. Instantly alert, Trant dropped at Benton's side.

The young doctor turned gauntly. "It's Dolly. She's — she's dead."

Mrs. Benton was obviously just dead. Above the disheveled, snow-flecked mink, Trant could see the ugly wound where the brick must have crushed down into her skull only a few moments before.

Somebody screamed. A policeman jostled through. Dazedly, Dr. Benton was holding his wife's limp, gloveless hand. "Her jewels," he muttered. "Someone must have been hiding behind the wagon. Some hoodlum . . ."

Soon a second policeman joined the first. They conferred with Benton, and then one of them approached Trant.

"Dr. Benton says you were with him when his wife called from the movie. He says that you —"

"Let's talk about that later." Trant

showed his credentials to the abruptly impressed officer. "What seems to have been stolen?"

"A pearl necklace and two diamond rings, sir."

An ambulance had arrived. White-coated interns were carrying the body away.

"What time," asked Trant, "does the ski-train leave for New York?"

"Ten twenty-seven."

"Then one of you'd better drop by the station and pick up a tall blonde in a bright red ski-suit. The name is Rogers."

"Pick up!" gasped the policeman.

"Miss Rogers?" Dr. Benton swung around.

Trant smiled apologetically. "On second thought, it would be better if we all went to the station together."

An indignant Miss Rogers was conducted from the train just before it was due to start. While the policemen and Dr. Benton watched blankly, Trant drew the glove from her right hand, revealing two sparkling rings.

"These, I imagine, are what you want. Probably the necklace is in her pocketbook. Arrest her, officer."

"But —" broke in Dr. Benton.

"And while you're about it," murmured Trant almost absently, "you might arrest Dr. Benton, too."

"Yes," Lieutenant Trant was explaining in the cozy, country police station, "Dr. Benton had an admirable idea. His wife was to be murdered for her jewels while he had a deliberately invited stranger as witness right with him to prove he was in his office at the time. Neat!"

Dr. Benton seemed to be showing some of the pallor of fear through his tan. The blonde still retained her composure admirably.

"But it's obvious what he did," Trant went on easily. "Either before or during the drive from his home to the theater, he hit her on the head hard enough to keep her unconscious for a couple of hours. A doctor could easily gauge the strength of the blow. He stripped off her jewels and left her unconscious in the station wagon in the deserted car park while everyone was at the movies. Then he got rid of the jewels to Miss Rogers when she came to the office."

"But how did you dope that out?" asked the police captain.

"When I was introduced to Miss Rogers, I shook hands with her. If she'd been wearing rings, I'd have felt them under the glove, but her hand was quite smooth. Later, however, when she reappeared from Benton's office, I saw rings while she was putting her gloves back on. Too bad! She should have arranged her gloves before she came out."

He paused. "All the rest, of course — the wife's call, the second call — was a cinch. Benton had left the brick in the wagon with his unconscious wife. He ran to the wagon and pulled her out. One heavy blow while he was pretending to examine her finished her off. And there he was, the stricken doctor discovering his only-just-dead wife. Neat. Very neat."

He looked at the glowering Benton and the disintegrating Miss Rogers. "The same tired old story, I suppose. The rich undesirable wife and the extremely desirable blonde."

The captain spluttered: "But the wife couldn't have been unconscious. She called from the movie."

"Oh, no, she didn't."

"Then . . ."

"That was Miss Rogers's other false step. I'm afraid she's less talented than Dr. Benton as a criminal. Because I'm a nosy character, I asked the person on the phone how she'd enjoyed the movie. She said she adored it. She was a drooling Tyrone Power fan, she said. Well, unhappily, Tyrone Power wasn't playing tonight."

The blonde stammered: "But . . ."

"Oh, I know he's on the marquee. No wonder you thought that remark was safe, Miss Rogers. But if you were a country girl, you'd know that small-town movies change Saturday nights and, during the evening show, they set up the marquee for Sunday's picture. Tyrone Power starts tomorrow."

He shrugged. "It wasn't hard for me to realize that the person on the phone couldn't have been to the movies. In fact, it wasn't hard to realize that both Mrs. Benton and the second caller were — you."

Lieutenant Trant turned to Dr. Benton.

"I'm sorry." The chagrin in his voice was almost genuine. "This is a hell of a thing to do to a host. I suppose I should have told you, before you invited me to the supper, that I was a policeman. But, somehow, it always sounds like such a peculiar profession."

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key on the right gives sources.

". . . good suspense, but ending a mite contrived. Orthodox Christie." (SC)	. . . strikingly inferior to Agatha Christie's long established level." (DD)	
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Edward J. O'Brien, as long ago as 1918: "Almost without exception his short stories represent the best that is being accomplished in America today by a literary artist."

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Here is a relatively unknown example of Wilbur Daniel Steele's work — a detective short story of mood, tension, and vivid background. And of something else: a technical subtlety that plays fair with the reader — even if you have to read the story twice to be convinced . . .

THE MANHUNTER

by WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

THE MOON WAS RISING. ALREADY it touched with silver the head of the dead volcano which held the island up out of the deep Caribbean waters; it flooded a high ravine here, or there on a far ridge a cornice of mahoganies thrashing in the trade wind. As yet, on the lee shore, beyond the faint glow from the portico of Government House, the mystery of starlight held on. The two men were hardly more than two shirt-fronts and the tips of two cigars.

"You've not been in the tropics before?" murmured the governor.

"No," said Loomis.

"Ah? It's rather extraordinary just at first, I fancy."

"Very."

They were silent again. The straggling town was already dark, the Negroes asleep between their mud and iron walls, the dogs snatching a wink before the moon came; nothing was to be heard save the ripple of the tide or the rare cry of a sea bird.

"You will be here for — for — ah — some time?"

"About a week, I should say, sir."

"Really? I wasn't aware we should

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look for a steamer to come so soon."

"The *Paramaribo* is to pick me up, I believe, direct for Halifax."

"Really?"

They had both stopped. Involuntarily they had drawn a little apart, and now they were facing each other, watching each other.

"Yes," Loomis went on, speaking slowly. "It's a bit out of the *Paramaribo's* way, but it's by government orders."

"The government of the Dominion of Canada?"

"Quite so." Loomis threw his cigar away with a kind of jerk and squared his shoulders. "I'll tell you, sir. Frankly, I've come here to take away a man. The man I've come to get, sir, is —"

"Is Jim White?"

Loomis paused for the fraction of a second before replying.

"The man *known* as Jim White. That is to say, Hyatt Carnes."

"I see! I see!" The governor turned a crab on its back with his boot toe. "There was another of your kind, some time ago."

"There was. Inspector Alward. He came out here in August. He did not return, as you are also aware. He was murdered here, whether by governmental collusion or not remains — I will continue to be quite frank with you, sir — an open question."

"It need not. I tell you the truth when I say that neither White nor I knew the fellow's name or errand. Had he been frank with me there would have been a different outcome. He thought best, instead, to be frank with the blacks. A mulatto by the name of Kragie did him in. Kragie was tried for murder, convicted, sentenced, *and hanged.*"

The moon had topped the mountain. Loomis's lids drooped slightly as he watched the other's face, bare in the white inundation.

"You believe, then, in the law?"

"I do — and I don't. I believe in the laws *I* make, simply because I know they are just laws."

He said it without bombast. Like Loomis, he was a self-made man, and, like Loomis, he did not presume upon the fact.

"By the way," he added, "you've a warrant, of course?"

"I have, sir — a warrant thirteen years old. Would you care to —"

"No, no. I take your word, as I ask you to take mine. But one thing. Why if Doctor Carnes was wanted — that is — well, what put you on the track of the man here?"

"Just a scrap of letter, sir, smuggled through to Doctor Carnes's sister in Vancouver. 'Address me Jim White, St. Katherine, B. W. I.' — that's all. Inspector Alward came out, and, as you know —"

"Yes, yes, quite so. Hmmm! Quite so."

"And now, *I* —"

"Quite so!"

The conversation had arrived at an *impasse*. Loomis lit a fresh cigar. They moved on again along the beach, away from the town, slowly. The peculiar, full-bodied beauty of night

and the ocean tropics lay about them, but if they took note of it, it was only with their nerves. Perhaps for this very reason the drain on the northerner's nervous fabric was deeper than he suspected; at any rate, he began to have a feeling he had never had before, a sense of impotence. He was a man to whom obstacles had always been essentially obstacles, nothing more. Suddenly he halted and faced around.

"Your Excellency," he said, "I can't help feeling that you are determined to put things in my way."

"No." The other appeared to weigh his words. "I shall put nothing in your way. . . . Shall we be walking back now?"

As they fell in step, the governor clasped his hands behind him and meditated on the shadow-streaked sand. He was a shorter man than Loomis, his flesh was softer and less resilient, his skin sallower, his brown eyes more deeply sunken by prolonged, half-won fights with fever. One would say he was no match for Loomis.

"You asked me," he said, "if I believed in the law. Let me ask — you've read, in your Hugo, about the chap called Jean Valjean?"

Loomis shook himself slightly, almost with a suggestion of anger.

"I am neither judge nor jury, sir."

"I see, I see." The other's tone grew even more abstracted. "I used to know Carnes in Canada. I knew his weaknesses and his strength. If it had been one of his weaknesses that led him to shoot Edward Blaine-Smith, I shouldn't have hesitated to give him up to the first constable in sight; you may take my word for that. As it was —"

"Oh, come, sir. Blaine-Smith was shot down in cold blood."

"Granted. But he had called Carnes's best friend a name — had called him more particularly 'a thief and a bastard.' The 'thief' we'll pass over. Neither is it a life-and-death affair to call a man the other thing — unless, mark me, *he happens to be one!* And this friend of Carnes's *happened to be one!* Now you will see —"

"I tell you, sir, I'm neither judge nor jury."

The governor's shoulders grew heavier.

"I suppose a judge would say the world didn't need a man who would shoot another man on such provocation. I'll tell you something, Mr. Loomis. There was an island in the world that needed such a man. When Doctor Carnes came here there were perhaps 200 people, and their lives weren't worth the bother of living. Doctor Carnes knew nothing of tropical diseases. Within two years he knew more about mountain fever, as we call it, than any other man in the Lesser Antilles. I repeat, sir, thirteen years ago this island was a pest spot. It was scarcely on the map. A mulatto tax-collector came over twice a year from St. Lucia; that was about all. Now there are upward of 9,000 souls, four parishes, a Government House, and — a governor."

The speaker bowed his head slightly at the last.

"Perhaps you will wonder, sir, how I, a comparatively poor man from another dominion, a nobody, a friend of the like of Jim White — how *I* — But I'll tell you. They tried one of their easy governors at first — one of their professional younger sons. It didn't do."

He stopped walking and touched the inspector's sleeve.

"Look about you! I am governor, but all this is the work of Hyatt Carnes."

The moon rode higher. In the vast white illumination the sea recovered the memory of the colors of day — phantom purples, ghostly turquoise. The shadows of palm boles lay across the beach like a tiger's skin; between the trees clusters of pale, heavy-lipped flowers stirred in the wind.

"It *is* beautiful," Loomis breathed, as if against his will.

The governor took in his look of admiration, half-nerves, half-awe.

"But not that!" he cried. "Beauty, yes! But one grows tired of beauty; sometimes one has a fearful thirst almost for ugliness — for something cold and hard-won and tawdry. No, this is what I mean — this town. This whole island, sir; the villages, the parish schools, the little estates of sugar and cocoa and limes. Seventeen thousand pounds sterling in exports *per annum*, sir! Seventeen thousand pounds!"

He stood so for a moment with his hands lifted.

"And *that*, sir, is what your *murderer* has done!"

"But I say!" Loomis shifted uneasily. "Hang it, sir, I'm *not* the judge. I'm a machine! I'm set to do a task. I do it."

On the gravel before the house a small Welsh mare stood mourning over her own shadow, her legs propped apart, her head drooping. The governor wheeled to face his companion.

"Mr. Loomis, I am going to put nothing between you and Jim White. In return I ask a favor. This: Until you have definitely to act, will you be so good as to say nothing of your errand; will you study this man *as* a man; and then — well, will you talk with me again?"

It was a moment before Loomis spoke. Under his drooping lids his eyes studied the other's face with something between mystification and easy wonder. In the end he murmured:

"Very well, sir."

"Done, then! . . . Shall we go in?"

At the door the governor's wife was awaiting them. She was a vaguely pretty, angular woman with dry hair and sallow skin, a typical Colonial. Her large blue eyes sought her husband's.

"Tom, Jim White is here." And she laid a hand on his sleeve with a gesture which seemed to say, "Don't, Tom!"

Jim White was seated at a long, bare mahogany table, under the light

of a candelabrum. Before him was a glass, a decanter of St. Croix rum, several lime peels, and an empty soda bottle. . . . Here was a man with whom low latitudes and exile had not dealt kindly. One could see by the dry luster of the eyes and the color of the skin stretched over the skull structure that long coping with fevers had not been without its price; more than by anything else his physical and mental ebb told in his nerves, his thin, arid, uncontrollable outbursts of temper.

He got to his feet unsteadily at sight of the governor in the door. He pounded on the table with his open palms.

"Yes, I'm here! Look at me all you want!"

His voice was shrill with defiance. He pounded harder.

"No, Tom, I won't be scolded tonight. The mist settled in Two Roads three nights ago. The fever struck before morning. The valley's astink with it. And I've come out. Here you see me, sitting in a clean room, drinking rum and soda, having a fine time."

The governor had not moved from the doorway. He spoke slowly.

"I suppose, then, that Jenks and Slowboy must be down with it, else, of course, you would have sent one of them out instead."

"Talk! Talk like a curate all you damn well please!"

The fellow's ecstasy was shocking. He showed his teeth. He pounded harder on the table. He danced on his toes. "Talk, talk, talk!"

The governor approached the table. His voice was quiet, austere:

"Now, sir, have the goodness to tell me what you're grousing about."

"I? Oh? Ha-ha! Why should I grouse? Isn't everything just too splendid in there? Only seventeen down, and as for ice, you know —"

"So! That's better!" The governor took up a pad. "Ice, eh!"

"Icebags, douches, quinine. But why grouse about *quinine?*"

"Icebags," the governor wrote, "douches, quinine —"

"Brooms, mops, formaldehyde —"

The governor looked up from his list. "Quite right. And now, Jim, go to bed. . . . Pollett! . . . I say, Pollett, show Mr. White up to the west chamber. Where's Gabriel? . . . Ah, Gabriel, here, this list. Look alive, will you! Make up a good stock, pack a camp, turn out Potter Snaith, Washington, and Coco. Tell Fox I shall want horses in front within the hour. . . . Pollett, you've not shown Mr. White up yet. . . . Jim, go! . . . Mr. Loomis — I'm afraid — for a few days — White, as you see, is quite done, and I shall have to go in and do the best I can, myself. For a few days, then, if you'll have the goodness to forgive my absence —"

"For a few days," Loomis broke in upon the apologies, "I don't fancy I shall get much of White, either. So, if you don't mind, I think I'd rather go along. Shouldn't mind seeing the country."

The governor bent his head to one side and studied him.

"As you please," he said. "And about White, you're quite right. I fancy you *wouldn't* see much of the impossible fellow *here*."

Loomis did not take the full significance of this till, about an hour later, the moonlit cavalcade came up into the shadow of the island jungle. And there, like a schoolboy not to be left behind, Jim White awaited them, leaning on the neck of the prop-legged pony. Nothing was said on either side as he joined. He fell in at the rear. He remained silent. He seemed chastened, listless, burned out. . . .

To the northerner that night ride over the tangled buttresses of the Morne was something not to be forgotten. The damp heat hanging under the leaves lay heavy in his lungs. The effect, paradoxically, was a sharpening of all the faculties. A million infinitesimal stirrings, cries, snappings, ululations, came to his ears through the forest walls; even in the pauses in travel there was no silence. His eyes glimpsed a multitude of things like serpents in the spotted light — creepers and lianas looping tree to tree. Or at long intervals the jungle sank away, giving up vast little savannas rolling down blue in the moon to hide away in mist-pools. Once there was a sight of the mountain and a ravine, and white mist flowing down the ravine, to fill the lower levels, where it lay like the beaten white of an egg.

"That, sir," the governor pointed out, "*that's* the rotten stuff!"

"God's curse and the devil's curse, too, be on it!"

White had come up from the rear; the malediction was his. A curious change had come over him. It was as if his fragile anger had returned, and yet it hadn't the quality of anger. The man looked rapt. An unhealthy eagerness drew him forward.

"See there!" His heels beat weakly at the pony's belly. "That's Two Roads just there, buried deep. God's damnation on it! choking the beggars in their beds. Tom, I say, are we all lame? Why do we want to be all night about it?"

It had been pretty near that, in truth; the moon was low, and although there was no light in the east, yet there was the feeling of pause in the air which comes before the sudden tropic dawn.

White's heels kicked with an increased, spasmodic violence; a wave of color ran hot over his cheeks; his eyes grew larger.

"Come, Tom! Damn it! Spur up! We must get down to them!"

"Take care, Jim." The governor turned in his saddle.

"Care? Hell! I'm going. I tell you Tom, I —"

The governor, leaning over quickly, caught the limp form and dragged it to him from the shying pony.

"Boys," he called back, "break out the camp under the road here. Get the wall tent up straight away. Mr. White is ill."

Watching him as he got down with his sagging burden, Loomis saw on

the governor's face a look of bewilderment, horror, and grief.

The tent was pitched. Dawn broke over the mountain, a white devastation. Loomis, uncertain precisely what to do with himself, heard the thin dribble of the sick man's delirium creeping out beneath the tent-flaps. After a moment the governor himself emerged. In the midst of the ordered confusion — Negroes panting under tent-rolls and cases, animals backing and snorting — there was something in the look of the short, green-faced, white-clad figure of the governor which seemed to say that he, too, for the moment, was uncertain precisely what to do with himself. He looked at the sky, the immeasurably empty dome of blue. He stared down the gently sloping savanna at the mist that had swallowed the village. The attention of his ears seemed to go back to the low-walled tent and the frail bumble of words without meaning. He wheeled and saw above him Loomis. . . . He came at something like a rush. Loomis had the strong but indefinable sense that he was being charged upon. And then the man seemed to have lost hold of what he had been going to say. An awkward silence fell between them.

"He is — very bad?" Loomis inquired at last.

"He will die," said the governor.

The complete, dry acceptance in the tone was shocking. For perhaps the first time in his life Loomis found himself stammering.

"But — but see here, sir — I — If there is anything at all I can do. I'm not much as a nurse, but if you care to have me look out for White, while you're down below —"

"No, thanks." The governor lifted both arms in a disordered gesture. "See here, my dear chap, you must get out. The road we came by has no branches; in daylight you should not miss your way; you should be at Government House by early afternoon. I will be there in a few days — four at most. Till then —"

Loomis, weighing the change which had come over the dignified, almost phlegmatic executive, did not move.

"I prefer to stay," he said, quietly.

"And *I*" — the governor grasped the horse's bridle — "I — I won't hear of it. There's danger here. I tell you, Loomis, I'll not have another agent's disappearance laid at my door, or at Jim White's. If it weren't for that you might jolly well —"

"But it isn't 'for that.'" Loomis spoke slowly, watching the other's eyes. "For there's no danger here above the mist. As you told me yourself, so long as one keeps clear of that —"

He dropped it, at sight of the other's face. One could see the man was not himself, that his reserve was shattered, that he was ashamed of himself and of what he was doing — a man forced to quibble in the presence of tragedy. Gratuitously, and of a sudden, Loomis retreated from his position.

"Well, your Excellency, have it as you wish."

Lifting the reins, he turned the animal back onto the trail. Within the minute he was swallowed by the green flood of the jungle.

That a man like Loomis should have surrendered his position so quietly should have been matter for suspicion. The fact was that he had not; he had simply avoided what is known in domestic affairs as a "scene." After a hundred yards he pulled up. He found a place where the leaf screen thinned on the shoreward side, and there, sitting motionless, he watched. He saw the camp completed. Under the waxing glare of forenoon he saw the Negroes starting down the savanna, the pack mules led. He saw the governor following, lagging, stopping once or twice as he went, and once again for a longer moment at the very margin of the mist pool, to gaze back at the tent left behind, a tiny snowspot on the verdant upsweep of the mountain. And then he, too, turning for the last time, followed the men and mules with a kind of leap into the glimmering smother below. . . .

Loomis lifted the reins and guided the pony back to the open. In the sight of the mulatto, Snaith, who had been left with the dying man, he took off saddle and bridle, wove a deft hobble of rope, and turned the animal adrift. Stooping, he entered the tent.

He saw the sick man lying on a canvas cot in the close yellow glare. Already he would scarcely have known him. The sallow skin of his face had turned a bluish-gray, blotched with bright crimson. His breathing was unrhythmical, stertorous, and difficult. His burning eyes, fastened upon the intruder, did not seem for a while to take him in.

Loomis made quick gestures with his arms. He drew nearer and retreated again, as if trying by motion or distance to bring himself within the focus of that sightless sight. In the end he succeeded.

"Who are you?" White demanded in a weak, thick voice.

"I am a man from Canada."

With an astonishing return of strength White lifted on an elbow.

"What are you doing here? What do you want?"

"Nothing. I'm going to look out for you."

"Go away!"

The odd and horrible mask was contorted with a scowl; the man's body sank back again; he rolled over, gasping, and turned his face to the canvas wall. Loomis hesitated a moment; then he went out.

In the open he found himself confronted by Snaith. Snaith had overheard the governor's command; he had also caught something of what went on in the tent. He found himself in a dilemma. The governor was his temporal god, and that his word should be treated lightly was beyond the mulatto's grasping. A truculent loyalty urged him to violence. . . . And yet the man before him, the offender, was a white man. A deep, inherited awe of all Caucasians bothered him. He was scared.

Loomis, reading this, took from an inner pocket a sheaf of official-looking papers.

"I assure you, my man, I'm quite all right here. If you care to see my credentials. —" He shuffled the papers carelessly. "No? I will tell you, then. Your governor makes laws for this island, but his laws are made for *him*, as you know, by the home government. I am from the home government." It was all a lie, but it seemed to suffice.

Bringing his saddle into the tiny triangle of shade thrown by the tent, Loomis made himself comfortable.

The sun rode high and higher. A dead heat lay on the world. Where in the dark of night there had been no silence, in the white tide of day nothing moved to mar the utter stillness. An hour passed; Loomis had rolled, lighted, and thrown away a dozen cigarettes, before the hush was broken by the mumbling resurrection of the voice within the tent.

Jim White, losing hold of his life in the humid brightness of a tropic isle, seemed to forget the brightness and the isle. He was a boy again — a young man — full of the powers and passions, the aspirations and lusts of youth. Through long spaces his words were incoherent; then for moments at a time fragments of sentences took on an incredible clarity, like the low syllables of a flute. . . . He talked with his love, by and by; his voice grew thick with a nervous tenderness.

Loomis listened without shame.

"I'm not a listener, I'm not an eavesdropper. I am a machine."

The sun gained the zenith. The sky was blue; the sea, beyond the roll of the land, stood up blue to the horizon; and yet the northerner, staring at it steadily, understood why one after another had written it down as brass. And the mist-pool in the hollow was more than ever like the beaten white of an egg.

Jim White had forgotten his love. Suddenly he was fighting. There was a growl, an oath; there came an incoherent paean of triumph; the fragile tent walls would not contain it; it rang strangely out across the rank, soft yielding body of the savannas. Words stood out clear and separate — names.

The light told on the listener. His eyes swam. The effort of keeping his attention fixed on one thing in that drooping air began to tell, too. It became an enormous effort. He was glad when the voice was done; he was worn out with intimacies; his brain rebelled.

"Good Lord!" he breathed. "Good Lord! No!"

For half an hour there had been silence. Loomis wondered if his man was dead. An astounding thing happened to him, and one of which he was not directly conscious. Tears welled over his lids and rolled down his cheeks — tears not so much of grief as of wonder.

He experienced one of the actual frights of his life when he discovered White's head protruding between the flaps near his elbow. The man seemed

to have gained flesh and color; the wasted places in his face had puffed out; his gray-blue eyes were dry and clear. He had become a quadruped, that was all — content with his hands and knees. For a moment he remained there between the flaps, staring down fixedly at the fog over Two Roads.

"The precious blacks!" he mumbled of a sudden. "Precious, filthy, sick blacks!"

His great, rosy face wagged slowly while he talked, as if with a curious exaltation of disdain.

"Why does a white man, a healthy, clean, educated white man, want to spend himself for a lot of ignorant, filthy blacks? Look at 'em!"

Loomis, who had been staring down there all day long, made the surprising discovery that black people were actually to be seen. They made no great show in that vast dome of day; they were more than anything else like a thread of flotsam cast up to await another tide on the beaches of an opaque sea; they walked and crept tiny on the savanna, far down, with cotton bedclothing, bundles, umbrellas, some with kettles and pans, all perfectly quiet, staring back into the poisoned mist or upward at the tent and the mountain. And Loomis saw that under the drinking sun the mist itself had grown a shade less opaque. There were phantoms in it; phantoms of huddled housetops made of grass — and the ghost of a white man in white coming painfully to the surface with a black woman on his back.

"Oh, well — Hell! Let's go!"

The sick man gave a kind of sigh as he said it. He shook himself clear of the flaps. Still on his hands and knees, as if he had got about that way all his life, he started down the slope. He went in the broad, blank sunlight to get the blacks and to meet his friend, an absurd quadruped, ambling down.

Loomis was on his feet. He stood very erect, with an odd sensation along his spine. He had hard work to make himself move; when he did, it was already too late. . . . White, slipping and crumpling on a more precipitous decline, had started to roll. He seemed to find rolling faster than ambling — and, besides that, he was dead.

For the first time in his life, very poignantly, Loomis felt himself, his errand, his career, his world, small enough to be in the way. He had started to run after the ambler. He stopped. He looked at the governor, toiling with an absurd and tragic haste uphill; he saw the black men and women and children coming like a swarm of flies. Turning about, he passed behind the tent. He caught up his pony, threw the saddle across its back, mounted, and rode away into the jungle track.

The light held for an hour, standing sultry in the rare openings between the treetops. Just before sunset it turned green. Then the night came. He gave the pony its head. In the whispering dark he rode with his shoulders sinking lower and lower;

only at rare intervals did he shake them into a momentary rectitude, muttering in protest:

"It's none of my affair. I'm not the judge nor the jury."

White's body came in that night about two hours after him, laid across a pack saddle. He saw it just for a moment in the little glow beneath his window; then the somber cavalcade of two moved on again. Where the mortal exile was buried, what it said on the stone they put over him, Loomis never knew.

For seven days then he lived a vacant life; vacant and yet singularly crowded. His hands were empty, his mind horribly full. His brain hummed with thoughts like a top. Doubts would never let him be. His aimless feet carried him back and forth along the single roadway of the town, blinking idiotically at the half-clothed people, the mongrel dogs, the still more mongrel pigs asleep in the dust. The flame-banks of exotic bloom, the aspiring palms, the peacock water, had so soon grown cheap. The immense whiteness of the sunlight drove him to shelter with a pain behind his eyes.

The governor's lady was kind — and worried. Being a British Colonial, she kept it to herself. Being a woman, she gave it away ten times within the hour. It told on the guest's nerves. Once he allowed himself the luxury of an outburst of protesting reassurance.

"But if he *weren't* quite fit, you would have *heard*, you know!"

"Oh, my word! Of course he's quite all *right!*" She cast back his own reassurance with a bright hard-lipped smile.

"It's all in not being afraid, with a thing like fever," he argued, solemnly. "So long as one's not afraid — White was afraid, I think."

"Yes, Jim White was always afraid." Something had gone out of her voice with that. . . . "And *he*," she cried out — "he, Tom, he *is* afraid. He'd tell you not; he'd tell me not. But I happen to have seen him in the night, after a time such as this, pacing the floor — fighting. Oh, yes, he is afraid. He knows, some day —"

Loomis escaped the house. Once more he wandered the dreary, brilliant corridor of his prison of idleness and doubt. A wild, unspeakable idea clung in his mind:

"Perhaps — perhaps, after all — he won't come back — alive."

Loomis hated himself; he did worse, he distrusted himself. . . .

But the governor did come back. He came out of the jungle late that evening when the town was asleep, like a soldier returning unheralded from some obscure campaign. His face was a little thinner and sallower, that was all; his eyes a little drier and brighter. He ate ravenously under the watching eyes of his wife.

There was a moment in the meal when a distinct but undefinable change came over him. He was paring a mango. He laid it down on his plate and turned his eyes to the corner where Loomis sat, half in shadow. It

was as though he had forgotten during the desperate week, and but now remembered the man — with something curiously like a shock.

He took up the fruit again and finished paring it.

Neither man slept. The clock in the small, tin-roofed "Church of England" had struck the half-hour after midnight when they met, as if by some unspoken assignation, in the open air beneath the portico.

The governor was the first to speak.

"You were with him — that day?"

Loomis nodded.

"He was delirious? He — he —" The governor turned his eyes to gaze uneasily out over the water. "He talked?"

"He did, sir."

The governor, his eyes still averted, waited. Loomis waited. The silence grew. The inspector was the one of the two who could afford to lose patience first. Turning away, he walked down the steps.

"But — good Lord, sir!"

The muffled outcry brought him back. He came and stood before the governor. His voice was brutal with deliberation.

"Do you want to know what he said, your excellency? I'll tell you. He told me, in those ravings of delirium, what I came all this way to learn. He gave himself away — Hyatt Carnes. He confessed to the shooting of Blaine-Smith. He lived over again the scene. He killed the man in the dawn, standing on an open street against the prairie. He has never forgotten the look in the dying man's eyes. But what he did, he did for a friend, and he is glad. That's what his ravings told me, sir. And he told me, sir, when he himself was about to die." He reached out to steady the governor's arm. "What's wrong with you, sir?"

"I — I seem —"

"You'll have to talk louder, sir."

"I seem to be done in. I've been on my feet — I — I need sleep."

"Why don't you turn in, then?"

"Th-thanks, I will. And you?"

"Presently."

Loomis did not make good his word. The clock in the church told hour after hour, and still he remained abroad, prowling the grounds and the deserted, starlit street. Each time that his restless circuit brought him within sight of the governor's dark windows he gave himself up to anger.

"Sleeping! The sleep of the just!"

He was torn between that and something else. The soft night wind, coming down over the body of the island, touched his lips and nostrils with the taste and perfume of peace. He seemed to see it as a thing resurrected — the villages, the new parish schools, the little estates of sugar and cocoa and limes. . . . He seemed to see a man pledging it with hands uplifted and eyes shining curiously in the moon: "That's what your *murderer* has done!" . . . He saw a man creeping up out of a mist-pool with an old black woman on his back.

"Damn it! Damn it! What's right after all?"

He continued to roam. The stars faded to the coming of the morning moon. His eyes caught the black windows of the governor's chamber again, and again he stiffened his shoulders and raised his chin.

"No, no, no! Neither one way or another am I the judge. I'm an officer of police. I'm not a jury; I'm a messenger, a machine."

In the moonlight, far out on the skyline, a wisp of smoke stood up. The *Paramaribo* was coming, swinging in from its northward course to pick up the officer — and his prisoner.

A kind of panic laid hold of Loomis. The thought of running in, pounding up the stairs, battering at the governor's door, crossed his mind and even as he stared at the entrance under the portico he saw the governor coming out.

The man had not slept, after all. He had not taken off his clothes. He looked tousled and musty. Red puffs stood under his eyes.

"Loomis," he said, coming straight down, "I've got something to say to you."

"What?" asked Loomis, waiting squarely across the path.

"This. Just — well —" The governor took his arm in a nervous grip and pulled him toward the beach. "Let's have a turn."

They went at a breathless pace. Just as when they had strolled on the same beach the other night in the moonrise, now, in the hour before dawn, there was a long, easeless silence. When words did come to the governor's lips, they tumbled out in a rush. He talked against time, against thought, against everything. He seized on the thing nearest in time, the fever at Two Roads.

"Bad, sir, shocking bad! . . . But not so bad as last time; a year ago in St. Barnabas Parish. Not by a jolly sight. Another time again, and it will be still easier to master, I fancy. It grows less. We shall have it in hand in time — in — in time. If only I am — if only I could be given — time. Time, sir!" It was the cry of a man going down. One realized that, of a sudden; the last cry of a forlorn hope that has come to its end.

In the growing half-light where the palm-boles stood up from the sand like gray iron bars, Loomis caught hold of his elbow and brought him to a halt.

"But this isn't what you came out to tell me, sir."

"I came to tell you — to ask you if you mightn't be wrong — about White. Are you sure — sure as life and death, sir — that he said what you say he said?"

"I am."

"But a confession may not be — it won't always hold. And the man was out of his mind, you know."

"That simply doubles the value of the evidence, doesn't it, sir?"

"Or else he *wasn't*. See here; he knew you were there? Yes! Suppose, then, that it was all a bit of acting —"

"Does a man *act* on his deathbed?"

"Not — not any man — except — Jim White. . . . And I won't have

it! I tell you I can't let him go under with that!"

"Then, sir, by all this, you mean to say — ?"

"I mean to say —"

The little governor of St. Katherine was shivering from head to foot. The dawn came. In the pink light his eyes went about him in a swift survey of the kingdom he had brought to life. And then his bloodless lips framed the word of confession.

But Loomis was too quick. Loomis, springing forward, had a hand over the lips. At sight of an act, a gesture, a word ready to be given, a miracle had happened. He was no longer torn. His course lay clear. In a wink he saw himself both judge and jury. He barked like a dog in his nervousness.

"No, no; I won't hear any more of this. My case is complete. . . . Look there! The *Paramaribo!* Lord! sir, but I must hurry!"

And with that he turned and was gone, running along the beach toward Government House. . . . In his chamber he flung his things together, crammed them into his bags; he tiptoed hastily out through the empty halls.

A pink-white longboat was coming in to the beach. The governor of the island stood on the sand, watching it, his hands clasped tightly behind his back. Loomis dropped his bags beside him for a moment, rubbed his hands, shuffled his feet awkwardly.

"I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to express my respects and gratitude to my hostess. It's so confoundedly early, and I didn't care to bother her — and the haste and all —" He extended his hand. "And as for you, sir. . . . Well, I admire your work here!"

His expression underwent an abrupt change. It was as if he had a "second thought." He dropped the bags, which he had caught up again.

"By George, sir! One thing. There was something which mystified me when I first came. One of the few things you *didn't* ask me — and one I should have thought you would have asked first — was whether or not I happened to have about me a photograph of the man — Doctor Carnes. The whole point of the matter was that I *had.*"

He drew a small photograph of a young man from his coat pocket, glanced from the pictured face to the living one before him, and then, with the slightest inclination of the head, tore it across and across and let the pieces fall in the water at his feet.

"It was the only one we could find in Canada," he explained. "Naturally, it is of no use now. . . . Goodbye, your Excellency!" Turning about, he walked to the waiting boat.

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A New Year's story in one of the grandest traditions of American literature — the tradition which included such authors as Alfred Henry Lewis, Owen Wister, Stewart Edward White, O. Henry — and Peter B. Kyne . . .

NEW YEAR'S EVE IN PANAMINT

by PETER B. KYNE

CHUCKWALLA BILL REDFIELD TOLD this story to me one cool night when we were camped at a "tank" on the edge of the Sheephole Mountains. We had supped and washed up the few kitchen utensils the old prospector found sufficient for his needs; having spread his suggins over a depression in the sand, thoughtfully made to receive his hips and permit his tough old carcass to repose in comfort, Chuckwalla Bill lay smoking and, by the light of our sage fire and a candle stuck in the neck of a bottle, perusing a magazine. We had found it three days before as we crossed the Santa Fe tracks through the Mojave desert, and blessed the bored tourist who had tossed it from the rear of the observation car.

Presently Chuckwalla Bill sighed and closed the magazine. "My eyes ain't what they used to be," he complained. He listened a couple of minutes to the steady champing of the jacks as they browsed in the guyetta grass close by, drew his Navajo blanket over him, and considered life as it is not — in the magazines. "And neither is my patience with these writin' fellers," he continued suddenly. "Bub, have you read that there dee-tective story? It's about one o'these scientific fellers that does all his deetectin' with machines. He sticks some kind of a jig-a-do in the wall an' listens to them conspirators gabbing in the room upstairs; then he hornswoggles one o' the suspected men into grabbin' hold of a what-you-may-call-it that registers his heartbeats.

"The dee-tective counts the heartbeats while the suspect is normal; then he says, all of a sudden: 'Here, you, mister. Out with it now and no hesitatin'! Who in thunder killed Cock Robin?' An' if that suspect has killed Cock Robin, why right off his guilty conscience gives a yank on his nervous system, causing his heart to skip two an' carry one, flutter a coupler times an' speed up ten or fifteen beats to the minute. Of course this scientific dee-tective knows right away he's follerin' a hot trail, so he runs some more ranikiboo on the suspected party, who presently lets out a whoop o' terror an' says: 'Yes I done it, an' I'm glad I killed him., He weren't fit to live nohow!' — which the said statement goes to

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prove this here suspect ain't no conscience to tug on his nervous system, an' why his heart should go to poundin' ain't rightly demonstrated. Me, I've knowed killers that didn't have no more conscience than a sidewinder an' couldn't be rounded up by no psychological dee-tectives — you take it from me."

"For instance?" I suggested, for Chuckwalla Bill has lived every split-second of his life, and I knew from experience that whenever the old gentleman presumed to take issue with one on any subject he could always cite a case in point to support his theory.

Why, Pinto Peters (continued Chuckwalla) and a murderin' hound by the name o' Blondy Holloway. Pinto Peters is the sheriff of Panamint, away back in the '80s, when Panamint's the biggest boom camp in the West an' I'm her mayor, on account o' havin' made the original strike an' bein' the richest man in camp, an' public-spirited to a degree that makes me hanker to trim the wool an' fleas off'n Panamint an' make a real city out o' her. Pinto Peters is a quiet, unassumin' feller o' 38 or 40, who's been lifted in his youth by the premature explosion of a can o' black powder while celebratin' his country's birthday. He's burned some, which leaves white scars all over his dark-complected face, an' he's more or less speckled under the hide from gravel an' powder the doctors can't never seem to pick out o' him. So we called him Pinto, an' in the grand left an' right o' politics after Panamint's incorporated, I nominate Pinto for town marshal, in which capacity he does such good work toward keepin' the peace without unnecessary killin' (as mayor I'm dead set against any killin's except as a last resort) that when Panamint becomes the county seat we run Pinto Peters for sheriff an' put him over like shootin' fish in a dry lake.

In his way, Pinto Peters is one of those scientific dee-tectives, only he don't work with instruments. Whenever Pinto Peters has any dee-tectin' to do, he just naturally applies common-sense principles an' a knowledge o' human nature an' lands his man, an' owin' to the fact that minin' camps in them days was run wide open an' everybody has money to burn, it stands to reason that Panamint, bein' the queen-bee o' camps, attracts enough hard *hombres* to keep Pinto passin' busy. By an' large, his office ain't what you-all'd call a sineycure, an' durin' the first few years of our municipal existence, and while Pinto Peters is busy givin' Panamint the reputation for bein' bad medicine for bad men, there ain't any citizen that adventurous he gets to honin' for Pinto's job.

What kind of a feller is this Pinto Peters? Wall, now, son, he is just a plain feller to look at — a little bit short o' being a big man, an' a little bit long o' being a little man. He's mild an' quiet an' kind an' neigh-

borly. He don't drink to speak of, on account o' whiskey bein' bad for the nerves, an' he's more of a listener than he is a talker. When he does talk, he's got a sort o' apologetic note in his voice. In a crowd of ten men Pinto is the tenth man, unless them ten men happens to be the sheriff's posse, when somehow, without anybody's realizin' how he got there, Pinto's up in first place. Really, there ain't nothin' remarkable about Pinto 'ceptin' his shootin'. He can draw so fast it's a case o' the quickness o' the hand deceivin' the eye, an' once he's ready for action, that old .45 single-action gun of his'n barks so fast it sounds like a volley. It's Pinto's pride an' pleasure never to draw first, an' in spite o' them drawbacks to longevity, Pinto's the sheriff o' Panamint until the camp goes bust an' commences what she has since finished — disappearin' from the face o' the earth. In the end Pinto's kicked to death by a jen' burro that's 35 year' old if she's a day.

It's Pinto's great knowledge o' human nature that enables him to make such a howlin' success in his chosen line of endeavor. If three honest men is settin' in a poker game with Pinto, an' a second dealer horns in, Pinto knows it first an' 'lows as how he's had enough poker to do him that day. If a crowd o' decent men is settin' in a room an' a crook steps up to the bar an' orders, Pinto gets nervous right off, like a dog dreamin' o' rats. He's what you-all might call specially gifted thataway, an' this here gift leads to some amusin' incidents. A killer, let us say, drifts in over the Nevada line. Pinto ain't never seen nor heard o' the feller before, but in the course of a day or two that killer finds himself alone with Pinto Peters at Bud Deming's bar, havin' a snort on Pinto.

"Be you aimin' to linger long in our midst?" says Pinto, casual-like.

"Can't tell, Pinto. Mebbe if I like the climate an' it ain't too hard to earn a livin', I'll stay an' grow up with the camp."

"Well, I tell you," says Pinto, sort o' blushin' at his own gall an' lookin' down at his boots, "while I ain't intendin' no insult, it's the custom in this camp for every gent that carries his gun between his hide an' the band o' his britches to call an' file his pedigree with me, before proceedin' to engage in any social or business pursuits. I don't suppose, now, you've got any objection to givin' me some references from your friends an' neighbors over in Nevada?"

"Wall, now, Pinto," says the Nevada gent, "I've got to 'low that ain't none o' your business."

"All right," says Pinto. "Roll your hoop, boy. Behave yourself, an' don't knife or gun anybody on brief acquaintance an' slight excuse. If so be you should have reason to suspect a feller of unsportsmanlike conduct in a card game tell me about it. Don't take the law in your own hands. In such cases I allers declare the game no contest — each gent takes back his money an' the unsportsmanlike

gent leaves camp immediately if not sooner. Some of 'em goes one route an' some t'other, but — they all go! You just bear that in mind, neighbor, an' excuse me for havin', by reason o' the requirements o' my office, spoke kinder blunt-like to you. I ain't aimin' to offend."

That little talk of Pinto's was generally enough to indicate to the Nevada party that Panamint warn't a healthy place for him unless he turned plumb respectable; so generally, after lingerin' a week or two for the sake of his self-respect, he'd cuss Panamint for a dead camp an' 'low as how he was goin' to move on to greener pastures.

Every so often, however, some gun-bully would drift in, 'lowin' to run things his way, an' so naturally him an' Pinto disagrees before long — an' Pinto allers let the gun-bully draw first — and shoot last, if at all. All o' them gun-bullies was drawed to scale in them days, an' a feller like Pinto could figure tolerably close just how they was goin' to act. But when Blondy Holloway drifted in he was a new note, bein' a different kind o' killer. I believe if Blondy hadn't been hung an' had lived till now you-all'd call him a yegg.

Yes sir, this Blondy's so plumb ornery an' non-conspicuous the most Pinto gives him credit for bein' is a sneak-thief or a drunk-roller. He don't tote no weapon, an' 'lows, when he lights in Panamint, as how he's lookin' for a job o' work in the Panamint Lily or some other o' the big silver mines that was operatin' in them halcyon days before the demonetization disease puts the crimp in Panamint's deck. Pinto looks him over on general principles an' forgets him.

Wa-ll, son, I reckon it's about a week later a prospector by the name o' Joe Reedley comes driftin' in from Hell's Bend, a-carryin' a coupler thousand dollars in dust an' aimin' to spend some of it in riotous livin'. He ain't in town two hours till he bucks up ag'in' one o' these here gun-bullies Pinto's had occasion to caution. It happens this way: Reedley comes into Bud Deming's place, lets out a whoop and lays his poke on the bar, at the same time a-wavin' his arm to all an' sundry to step up an' liquidate. Among his guests is this Blondy Holloway and Tom Caldwell, the gun-bully. Reedley is dead sober at the time, an' the minute he recognizes Caldwell he says:

"Here, you, Tom Caldwell! When I invited all hands to step up, I didn't notice you in the house. I ain't aimin' to have no trouble with you, but at the same time I ain't plannin' to drink with you neither. I ain't forgot that you killed my partner in cold blood an' got away with it some two years ago in Tucson. Nothin' but the fact that I'm a peaceable citizen, a stranger in camp, and New Year's is only a coupler days off prevents me from eliminatin' you here an' now. As it is, git out o' my sight an' stay out."

The words ain't out o' his mouth

until Tom Caldwell's reachin' for his artillery, but Pinto Peters, who's standin' right behind him, pinions his arms an' the excitement fails to mater'alize.

"Brother," said Pinto, kinder soft-like, in Caldwell's ear, "your life was in no danger from this man Reedley, an' you know it. Didn't I warn you about this habit o' takin' the law into your own hands? Now let me add my mite to Joe Reedley's suggestion. You git out o' Panamint within the next twenty-four hours — an' stay out. An' remember, Caldwell: if you ain't out by this time tomorrow afternoon, you ain't goin' to git out a-tall. We'll plant you here."

He takes Caldwell's gun, gives him a shove through the door, an' the incident is closed, 'ceptin' a little sound advice Pinto gives Joe Reedley — an' that is: "Stay sober!" Joe takes his advice, an' along about midnight he moseys down to the feed corral where he's holed up his jacks an' outfit. Owin' to the fact that every room in Panamint's full-up an' men payin' a dollar for the privilege o' the dining-room table an' the floor, just to be under cover, Reedley beds down in the sand o' the corral with mebbe a dozen other prospectors, an' goes to sleep. He never wakes up. Some time durin' the night he gets his skull stove in with a prospectin' hammer an'dies without lettin' a peep out o' him. It's done so quiet that even the men sleepin' close by don't know it until gettin'-up time.

Son, it's sure a mystery. The buzzards millin' around in the corral have killed all chance o' pickin' up a trail, an' it looks to all hands like a plain case o' cold-blooded murder for revenge, because while Reedley's poke is missin', the buckskin sack is still in his pocket, an' as Joe was a free spender nobody sees anything suspicious in the fact that the poke is gone. Public suspicion naturally fastens on Tom Caldwell, who's still in town waitin' to go out on the noon stage, an' so Pinto Pete includes Caldwell in his round-up o' suspicious characters, an' locks 'em in the town jail to await the sweatin' process. On general principles, an' not that he has the slightest notion he's guilty, Pinto thinks it might be well to include Blondy Holloway, him bein' a shifty-lookin' stranger without visible means o' support.

Right here is where Pinto's knowledge o' human nature begins to manifest itself. He tackles Tom Caldwell first an' gets a flat denial, of course, but Caldwell can't prove no alibi; so after laborin' with him all day, Pinto concludes to hold him a while on suspicion an' see if mebbe in the meantime he can't pick up a clue. He's firmly convinced in his own mind that Caldwell's done the killin', but he refrains from talkin' an' does a lot of thinkin', in the meanwhile bringing' each fish in his net up for cross-examination.

"Chuckwalla," he says to me after three days o' futile questionin', "this Reedley killin' is shore some mysterious. I got a dozen men that might

have done it, but none of 'em can prove an alibi that'll hold water, an' somehow it strikes me a lot of 'em ain't any too worried about provin' their innocence."

Of course I'm mayor o' Panamint at the time, an' in my official capacity I've had to give some attention to the public welfare. Consequently I see a light where Pinto sees darkness.

"Pinto," I says, "you must remember Panamint's a boom camp, without houses enough to shelter more'n two-thirds of her rapidly increasin' population. Remember also that while this here camp is hell with the lid off in summer, it's apt to freeze the whiskers o' Death in winter, an' it occurs to me that jail o' your'n ain't a half bad place for a busted wanderer to spend a happy New Year's day an' make some sound New Year's resolutions to keep out of jail thereafter. It's my guess they're aimin' to fill up on that turkey dinner you-all plan to give your boarders tomorrow. They're right comfortable in jail an' don't plan to do no talkin' that might turn 'em loose until they're tired o' jail an' anxious to drift."

That idea sort o' hit Pinto between the eyes. He sat down an' thought a long time, an' finally he says to me:

"Mayor, I'm a-goin' to find out tonight which one o' them birds in my cage killed Joe Reedley."

"How?" I asked.

"Never you mind, Chuckwalla," he says. "I tell you this much, though: The leopard can't change his spots nohow, an' human nature just naturally can't help assertin' itself. What you just said give me an idea an' diverts my suspicions in an entirely new direction. There's one man in my jail that's plumb nervous at bein' in there, an' if so he's the man that killed Reedley — an' come to think of it, I believe he did. I'm goin' to give him a chance to convict himself. I been too precipitate in this deal, Chuckwalla. Just because Caldwell's a killer and tried to shoot Reedley for bawlin' him out in company thataway, I'm like all the rest of the people. When Reedley's found dead, I look for his known enemy — Caldwell. I've took Caldwell's gun away from him the day before, which leaves him without his favorite weapon, an' opens up an excuse for him usin' the prospector's hammer.

"Come to think of it, though, Chuckwalla, did you ever hear of a gun-man gettin' downhearted because he's lost his gun? Right off he goes and begs, borrers or steals another; he kills with a gun because he's got a reputation for bein' fast on the trigger an' he's just vain enough to want to earn that reputation. Besides, come to think of it still further, murderin' with a hammer is a low-down, cowardly form o' killin' — an' I'm bankin' Tom Caldwell's got courage to throw away. If he'd waited to kill Reedley, he'd have waited until I wasn't around; then he'd have taunted Reedley into drawin' first."

"Pinto," I says, "that there line o' reasonin' looks air-tight an' water-tight to me."

"Seein' which," says Pinto, "we'll make a demonstration o' the ability of a human bein' to refrain from doin' the things he wants to do. Chuckwalla, right after supper, I'd be obliged to you if you was to wrap yourself up warm, heel yourself for bear, an' walk out o' town about a mile on the south trail until you find a good warm spot where you can command the trail. Stay there until mornin', an' if you see a mounted man dustin' for the Rio Colorado, stop him an' hold him until I come along."

"What are you aiming to do?" I says.

"Me?" he says, winkin'. "Why, I'm goin' to stay in camp an' get fuller'n a tick."

I couldn't get no more out o' Pinto, but bein' anxious to observe his experiment, I buckled on my two guns — .38s they was, on .44 frames — took my blankets an' sneaked out o' camp after dark. I holed up in the shelter o' some *mal-pais*, where I could see the white trail in the starlight for half a mile.

Along about 9 o'clock that night, when all the prisoners in the Panamint jail — there was 30 of 'em — was sound asleep, Pinto Peters appears in the corridor, all lit up like a church bazaar an' carryin' a lantern. He has the big jail key in his hand, and he goes down one row o' cells and up t'other, a-bangin' the bars an' howlin': "Hear ye, hear ye, all ye prisoners in Pinto Peters's calaboose, attention!"

All hands crowded out o' their blankets to listen to Pinto, who's weavin' a little on his feet.

"Have a snort o' happy New Year on Pinto Peters," he shouts.

An' he goes down the line o' cells passin' a bottle in for each prisoner to take a jolt. Then he unlocks all the cell doors, orders all hands to dress *muy pronto*, an' meet him in the corridor — which bein' done, Pinto Peters lines 'em up an' makes a speech.

"Gentlemen," says Pinto — whereupon all them worthless, ornery men knows he's more'n half drunk, or he wouldn't have called 'em gentlemen — "it has occurred to me that the Panamint jail is one hell of a cold, cheerless place for any human bein' to spend New Year's Eve, an' while as Sheriff Peters it's my sworn dooty to see you spend it there, nevertheless, an' ag'in, as Pinto Peters, human bein', I'm opposed to all forms of cruel an' unusual punishment. Now, therefore, dependin' on your honor as gentlemen, I'm a-goin' to turn you all loose, chuck away the key to the jail, lead you all down to Bud Deming's place, an' give one an' all a touch o' high life. Do I hear a second to the motion?"

He did — a chorus of them.

"Very well," says Pinto. "All them that's prepared to play fair with Pinto Peters because he's playin' fair with them, will step one pace to the front."

Every prisoner present steps one pace to the front, an' they all give three cheers for Pinto Peters, the human sheriff. Pinto unlocks the jail

door, chucks away the key, an' leads his gang down to Bud Deming's place, which is a combination saloon, gamblin'-hall, dance-hall, an' restauraw. His entrance creates somethin' of a diversion, as may be expected, for since Pinto's party has been recruited mostly from Bud Deming's an' similar points of interest in Panamint, naturally there's instantaneous recognition all around, as the feller says. The nightly pleasures of Bud Deming's place is abandoned for the nonce, an' all hands surges up toward Pinto an' his delegation. Pinto, feelin' that explanations to his constituents is in order for his high-handed proceedin', holds up his hand enjoinin' silence, an' everybody listens.

"Bud," says Pinto, addressin' the proprietor," gimme a drink. I'm a-goin' to make a speech, an' I want to wet my whistle first."

So Bud gives Pinto five fingers of red disturbance, an' Pinto pours it into himself at one gulp, drunkard fashion; whereat everybody turns to his neighbor an' 'lows as how Pinto Peters, the only tee-totaler in camp, is mos' certainly celebratin' the New Year. There's heads shakin' here an' there, an' everybody's tellin' everybody else what a shame it is that a fine feller like Pinto should slip his hobbles after years of virtue.

"Ladies an' gentlemen," says Pinto, "I sinsherely hope there ain't no man in Panamint so foolish as to interfere in my program for these here feshtivities tonight, an' in order to guard ag'in' the attentions o' sober-minded citizens, I hereby app'int Tom Caldwell a deputy sheriff."

He hands the killer one of his old .45s. "Tom," he says, "I got you in charge on suspicion o' havin' murdered Joe Reedley, but nobody ain't proved nothin' on you yet, an' as I'm a-holdin' you in detinue without due procesh of law, it's in my power to turn you loose — which I do for tonight — an' to nominate you assistant floor-manager at my party."

"I accept the nomination, Pinto," says Caldwell; an thereupon Bud Deming, which for all his faults, an' he had a lot, is the most human feller I ever meet, sets up the drinks to the house an' bids Pinto an' his party welcome. The tension is relaxed, as the feller says, an' trade commences to pick up agin.

"Pinto," says Bud, as him an' Pinto an' Tom Caldwell an' Blondy Holloway (Pinto's took a drunken shine to Blondy, for some reason or other) are havin' a snort at the extreme end o' the bar, "ain't you-all afraid some o' these here birds o' your'n will fly the coop?"

"Nary bit," says Pinto. "I've give 'em all due warnin' that any preshipitate retreat results in me cancelin' the order for the big turkey dinner tomorrow, an' a-feedin' em, one an' all, on sody biscuts an' water for a week — which naturally reshults in makin' every man his neighbor's jailer, because none of 'em is figurin' on lettin' the other feller do 'em out of his rights. I'm just a-bankin' on human nature, Bud."

"If you'd sized up human nature acrost a bar as long as I have," says Bud, "you wouldn't have so much faith in it. I'm a-layin' you five to one, Pinto, somebody gives you the slip an' dusts before mornin'."

"Which if he does," says Pinto, "he's most certainly out o' luck. I got the fastest saddle-horse in this here county. Why, say: I'll give Tom or Blondy here a two-hour start on the next best horse in town, an' I'll have him within rifle range six hours later. That there big blue roan hoss o' mine just don't know what the word *tired* means. His sire was Cyclone, out of Tornado, an' his dam was Whirlwind, out o' Typhoon. He's a lineal deshendant o' Greased Lightning."

Pinto goes on thataway for quite a spell, braggin' about his hoss, with Bud disputin' him, till finally Pinto gets mad, 'lows as how the blue roan's not only a runner but a jumper, an' offers to bet Bud a hundred dollars he can ride the roan in the front door an' from a fifteen-foot run jump him over the billiard-table without touchin'.

"A four-foot-an'-a-half billiard table is some handicap," says Bud. "I'll take you, Pinto, on the understandin' that if you damage the table you pay for it."

"Eat him up, Tige," says Pinto, an' slams a hundred dollars on the bar. "Who-all'll be the stakeholder?" he says.

"Well," says Bud Deming, "seein' as how you ain't afraid to trust Tom Caldwell with a gun, I ain't afraid to trust him with the stakes."

"Suits me, Bud." Pinto turns to Blondy, who's been drinking soft drinks thus far. "Blondy," he says, puttin' his arm around the yegg an' huggin' him affectionate-like, "just to show this here pessimist Bud where to head in, I'm a-goin' to show him what he don't know about human nature'd fill a book. You-all slip over to that little barn back o' the jail, saddle my blue roan hoss, an' bring him over here. After I win Bud's hundred, the gang'll repair to the restauraw at midnight an' have a banquet."

"That certainly listens well, Sheriff," says Blondy modest-like, "but the fact is, you're overlookin' a bet. With every man his brother's keeper tonight, how can I get out o' here to git your hoss?"

"That's so," says Pinto, his speech gettin' thicker an' thicker every minute. "I'll have Tom Caldwell escort you-all to the door. See that you git that hoss an' hurry back."

So Caldwell an' Blondy walk out together, an' at the corner o' the street Caldwell turns back. Comin' into Bud Deming's place again, Caldwell notices a change has took place in Pinto's demeanor, as the feller says. He's lost that drunken leer to his face an' is grinnin' like a fool; likewise there ain't no sag to his person as Caldwell lines up at the bar alongside him.

"Tom," he says, "personally, I ain't got much regard for you as a

man, an' better men have been hung on less circumstantial evidence than I've got to convict you. Somehow, I got a notion that if you was to be regularly tried, you wouldn't have no more chance than a celluloid dog chasin' an asbestos cat through hades."

"Pinto," says Caldwell, "I don't love you none, but I'll take a chance on you seein' to it that I git a fair trial."

"Thanks," says Pinto. "You're a-gettin' it right now. The jury's out, an' I reckon the verdict will be in about ten minutes from now. In the meantime, you might hand Bud an' me back our money, because my blue roan hoss ain't a-goin' to jump no billiard table tonight. As the sheriff o' Panamint, I declare that bet all off."

"Why so?" says Bud Deming, openin' his eyes in wonder.

"For the same reason that I'm cold sober now, whereas I was three-quarters drunk a minute ago," says Pinto. "For the same reason your gentlemanly barkeep has been feedin' me on cold Ceylon tea, which looks like hard liquor but tastes better, with a touch o' lemon an' sugar added." An' Pinto laughs an' calls for drinks for his gang o' jailbirds.

Well, sir, they ain't scarcely set till Pinto's chief deppity comes bustin' in.

"Well?" says Pinto.

"I follered him," says the deppity, "keepin' on the other side o' the street, in the shadder o' the buildin's — just like you said for me to do. He went down to the edge o' the Panamint Lily dump, scratched around a minute, an' then headed straight for the barn. He rode out on the roan three minutes ago an' headed south."

Pinto Peters turned to Tom Caldwell. "The verdict o' the jury is 'Not guilty, Your Honor,'" he says. "Sorry to have been forced to keep you in jail the past week, but mistakes will happen."

"None whatever," says Caldwell, an' he hands Pinto back his gun. Pinto turns to Bud Deming. "Slip into the restauraw an' tell 'em to set 29 plates for the guests in my hotel," he says. "Blondy won't be there, or it'd be an even thirty."

It's ten minutes after 12, an' I'm gettin' sleepy, an' cussin' Pinto for his experiment in human nature, when away up the trail I hear the sound of a shod horse. I listen, an' I make up my mind somebody's comin' like he'd been wired for an' delayed, an' pretty soon I see a blur away up the white trail.

"Chuckwalla," I says to myself, "here comes the man that killed Joe Reedley," and I filled both hands an' stepped out into the trail as he comes poundin' along.

"Hands up!" I yelled, an' covered him. The horse, frightened, stopped so sudden the rider went lurchin' out on his neck, hung there a split-second, an' comes sprawlin' down in the trail, all spread out like a starfish.

"You're under arrest," I says, and — *bing bang!* — he cuts down on me. I fires at the flash, rippin' his shootin' arm from knuckles to shoulderblade,

an' it's all over. While he lies there cryin' an' cussin', I takes his gun away from him an' go an' catch the horse. Then I light a match an' look my man over. It's Blondy Holloway.

While I'm wrappin' up his arm to keep him from bleedin' to death, I hear another hoof-beat down the trail, an' pretty soon Pinto Peters rides up on his spare horse.

"Well, Chuckwalla," he says, "it kinder looks as if it was a safe bet bankin' on human nature, after all. As the Scriptures say, 'The wicked flee when none pursueth,' and it occurred to me this Blondy Holloway person was a mite distressed at bein' in jail. So I put him on his honor not to run; then I give him an opportunity to run an' a good hoss to run with, includin' my old forty-five loaded with blank cartridges in the saddle holster. My chief deppity follered after he left my shack, an' saw him dig up Joe Reedley's other poke, where he'd buried it until the excitement o' the murder would have a chance to die out. Frisk him, Chuckwalla, an' see if he got the poke."

Sure enough he had it, with *I. R.* stenciled on the buckskin bag; so we took him back to jail, an' in the course o' time he was convicted an' hung. As for them other jail-birds, they all come stragglin' in about sun-up an' went to bed in Pinto's jail. Some of 'em said afterward they was strongly tempted to take advantage of Pinto an' *vamos*, but they just couldn't manage it, on account o' Pinto Peters bein' so doggoned fair and square thataway, an' treatin' 'em like human beings. Of course, Pinto suspected Blondy Holloway, an' made it easy for him to convict himself, but even if Blondy hadn't been the right man, the scheme would have worked out just the same. The guilty man would have run, whosoever he was. If Tom Caldwell was the guilty one, he had his chance too. But a gun-bully in them days wouldn't run from nothin' — he had his reputation to sustain.

"Bein' as how it was New Year's morning when Pinto pulled off his party. I suppose a pleasant time was had by all."

"Son, that sure was one jamboree, an' the best part of it was that it didn't cost Pinto Peters a cent. Bud Deming's so charmed with Pinto's dee-tective ability he declines to render a bill an' declares the party's on the house."

"You mean not one of those guests pulled out for greener pastures?"

"Nary one, son. Them as was in on suspicion only was told they could go, but they warn't goin' until they'd slept off the celebration in Pinto's jail an' did justice, so to speak, to the turkey dinner he'd promised them. Even the two murderers, which they was already condemned to git hung, come quietly to jail — which proves that a feller can kill a man an' yet be ashamed to double-cross a square dealer."

With this summing-up of the case, Chuckwalla Bill bade me good night.

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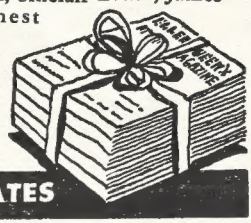

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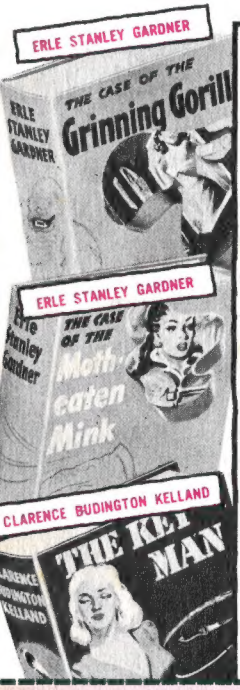

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3 *Clarence B. Kelland*
THE KEY MAN

Pete Mortain listened as the Inspector said: "One clue will lead me to the *killer*—a Stradivarius violin." Pete walked into his room and his blood froze. There was the *Stradivarius!*

4 *Agatha Christie*
BLOOD WILL TELL

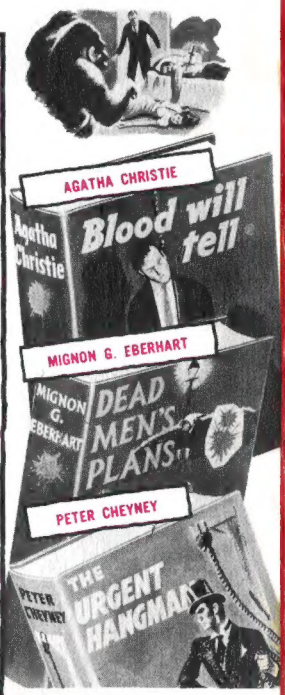
Poirot has to solve a crime for which a man has *already* been sentenced. There isn't a shred of evidence—until he uncovers a newspaper clipping. Now he's sure who the murderer is—*until he finds HER MURDERED!*

5 *Mignon Eberhart*
DEAD MEN'S PLANS

The police suspect *you* of taking a shot at your step-brother, Reg. You stay near Reg's bed at the hospital. You leave for a few minutes. When you return, you find him — *MURDERED!*

6 *Peter Cheyney*
THE URGENT HANGMAN

Slim Callaghan was a "dead duck"—unless he found out who would inherit the dead man's fortune. But first, he'd have to find the will. And *before* he could do that, he'd have to find the . . . KILLER!



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